



PK 250
#5824

Mr. Guelpa

THE FAMOUS FRENCH DETECTIVE VISITS AMERICA AND
FINDS THE MOST BAFFLING MYSTERY OF HIS
CAREER AWAITING HIM

By
VANCE THOMPSON

Author of
THE POINTED TOWER, ETC.



7/51

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

DISCARD
RECEIVED
JAN 10 1911
LIBRARY

COPYRIGHT, 1925
BY THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

Printed in the United States of America

PRINTED AND BOUND
BY BRAUNWORTH & CO., INC.
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

WILDWOOD CITY

TO MY WIFE

LILLIAN SPENCER THOMPSON

My Collaborator in Life, Love and Letters

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE NARROW HOUSE	I
II BURIED IN FIRE	16
III THE WIDOW	29
IV GRAPHOMETRY	41
V "EVIDENCE POURS IN"	53
VI THE RECORD IN THE DUST	67
VII THE GIRL WHO SAID NO	87
VIII THE CROOKED TREE	98
IX THE IMAGE AND THE MAN	113
X THE GRAY COAT	136
XI THE MOUSETRAP	156
XII THE SHADOW	172
XIII EVE IN THE GARDEN	187
XIV ARIADNE'S THREAD	200
XV PETER BARLING	218
XVI SLEEP AND DEATH	230
XVII THROWN TO THE WOLVES	248
XVIII CAPTURED	269
XIX THE UNPARDONABLE SIN	283
XX THE GHOST LETTER	298
XXI DEAD LIPS SPEAK	317
XXII SEAWARD	329

MR. GUELPA

MR. GUELPA

CHAPTER I

THE NARROW HOUSE

THE man who did not want to die lay in his bed. The room was on the second floor of a Narrow House in West Ninth Street. It was an old house dating from the last century, but it had been furnished up into a new kind of smartness; the brick face of the house was bright with paint, rivaling the wood of windows and doors and the scrolled iron-work; and within was the same air of newness, expressed in the gaudy, gimcrack furniture, the glaring rugs and the colored prints—hunting-scenes and women's heads—the machine-made rubbish of the bargain counters. Even the room where the man lay seemed, with its brass bed and painted chairs, too tawdry a place to die in. Only a flippant kind of death, it would seem, could enter there.

It was after midnight, but the noise from the sleepless New York streets came sullenly through the half-opened window of the bedroom. There was

only one light—a shaded one on the sidewall. It fell upon the bed, leaving the rest of the room in shadow. And there the man lay, his big head with ruffled hair and unshaved face on a flat pillow, his great arms, half naked, muscular, hairy, stretched out on the bed-cover. He was breathing heavily. His chest heaved up and down. His eyes, reddish like his hair, were wide open and the fear of death was in them; that, and deeper than the fear, amazement. It was as though he had known vaguely that men died, but that *he* should die! He looked down at the strength in his big arms; then his eyes went to the women in the room.

There were two of them.

One crouched in a big chair in a dusky corner of the room. She was dressed in gray, in some kind of house-gown. There was a shawl drawn over her head, perhaps against the night air coming through the window. Under the bend of the shawl her face looked white and shadowy. White hands lay side by side in her lap, motionless. Except for the paleness of face and hands and the light in the eyes she might have been part of the shadow.

Apparently the other woman was the nurse, for she was dressed in a uniform of bluish-gray linen. She was a slow-moving woman, with a strong gentle face. She went to the bedside and moistened the man's face with water. He tried to speak, but no words came—only the gasps of breath. He wanted to speak, but it was evident that now he knew he

could not. His eyes, distended with the fear that was in them, stared up at the nurse. She stooped and smoothed his forehead, pushing back the wet red hair.

"I have telephoned for Doctor Hamilton," she said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "and he will be here soon—very soon, now, Mr. Benton."

He must have understood. From where he lay he could see the door, and now he watched it, with fixed expectancy. Always his lips moved thickly in a vain effort to speak; and he could not. Again the nurse bent over him. After a moment she went softly to the woman in the shadow.

"Mrs. Benton," she whispered.

"Yes?" The apathetic face was lifted for an instant.

"I fear he is dying."

She leaned forward in the chair and stared at the man in the bed.

"He is very weak and I fear he is——"

The nurse turned, startled, for the dying man had gasped out something—a few meaningless words and was making an effort to lift himself up.

The door had been silently opened and in the light from the hall a little Japanese lad stood, faintly smiling. He raised his hand in the air, still smiling, and stepped back to make way for the physician who had been summoned. Doctor Hamilton nearly filled the doorway. He was broad and tall, a big-featured man with a short brown beard. He looked

for a moment at the woman in the corner and then went swiftly to the bedside; big as he was he was light-footed, restlessly active.

"Nurse, why didn't you call me before this?" he asked abruptly, and without waiting for a reply bent over his patient. When his examination was finished he moved to the foot of the bed and stood there, frowning moodily.

The nurse questioned him with a glance. She read the answer in his grave bearded face.

The man who did not want to die was dying. The fear and even the amazement had gone out of the dying eyes. They were wide open and—empty. The big chest hardly moved as the breath failed. But the hands clenched themselves like the hands of shipwrecked men or those who fall into a gulf; they were clinging to life. Then they too were still.

A little longer Doctor Hamilton stood, looking reflectively at the big body on the bed. Then he signaled to the nurse. Without a word she drew the bed-cover up over the clenched hands and over the face, with its wide open eyes.

"Doctor Hamilton."

"Yes, Mrs. McCune?"

"It is she who needs you now—she is broken—look——"

Mrs. Benton rose; it was as though she had heard their whispered words. The shawl fell back from her head, disclosing the set face, without color, and the pale eyes that stared beyond them toward

the bed. And when she spoke her voice was also colorless.

"It can not be," she said, "he is not dead——"

Suddenly she wavered and, before Doctor Hamilton could reach her, she reeled back on the chair and lay there a huddled figure that seemed to have fallen in on itself. With rough tenderness the doctor lifted her and made her easy in the chair.

"Steady, Mrs. Benton, steady. There, that is better. You must be strong you know. Quiet."

The very sound of his deep kind voice seemed to revive her. A little of the tensivity went out of her face.

"You must remember no one could have done more for him than you have done—think of that, Mrs. Benton—the sleepless nights you have given—your devotion——" This was Nurse McCune speaking to her with quiet insistence, one hand on her shoulder.

"Think, too, of him," the doctor interposed in his quick way, "his suffering is over. He did not suffer long. Remember that. And now it is all over."

"He is asleep," the nurse murmured.

And while they repeated these platitudes of the death-chamber Mrs. Benton neither spoke nor moved, but finally as though the last word were echoing in her brain she said, "Yes, I am very tired. I must sleep."

"Nurse, take her to her bedroom," Doctor Ham-

ilton spoke abruptly, as was his wont, but his tone was gentle, "and do what you can—I shall see her before I go."

He helped her to her feet and the nurse, one arm supporting her, led her out of the room. When they had gone Doctor Hamilton went back to the bed, and pulled down the white sheet that covered the dead man. He had been there for some time, when Nakki came into the room, a spectacled youth dressed in such clothes as college lads wear. The little Jap glanced from the doctor to the bed and back again.

"Dead?" he asked calmly, the faint habitual smile still on his lips.

"Yes," replied Doctor Hamilton, and he drew up the cover once more, "your master is dead."

"He was a very fine man," Nakki said in precise English, "too bad."

"Wait here, Nakki, I am going to speak to the nurse."

He met Mrs. McCune at the door of the chamber farther down the hall.

"She is resting now," the nurse whispered. "I got some of her clothes off—she is all right. It is the strain and when it was over she just seemed to collapse."

"I shall see her before I go. Where can we talk? Parlor?"

The room called the parlor was down-stairs. It was small, and seemed smaller as the doctor strode

about it in his huge active way, talking, while Mrs. McCune watched him admiringly but with faint amusement.

"I didn't mean to bully you for not telephoning me earlier," he was saying, "it wouldn't have mattered. Of course I thought I'd pull him through. But you know the type. Athlete, eh? That type. All muscles and no physique—big tree and shallow roots. You'd think the tree would stand for ages. A puff of wind and it's down. Puff! and your strong man is dead. Why? I don't know. We never know. We pretend—and we've got a lot of Greek and Latin words that sound as though they meant something, but they don't——"

"His heart, Doctor——"

"Yes, good, Nurse, good! When a man's heart stops beating he usually dies, doesn't he? You are an informative woman, Mrs. McCune. And heart failure means the heart has failed. Yes."

Doctor Hamilton had been prowling up and down the room, tossing his words over his shoulder. Now he sat down near the nurse.

"What do you know about him?" he asked.

"Nothing—until you called me in."

The sum total of their knowledge was not much. It amounted to this: Mr. Benton had been the doctor's patient once before; that time it had been a cold and nothing more; then he had gone south, for he seemed to be fond of travel; then a month or so ago he had come back to New York, from Cuba, he

had said, and wondered whether he had a touch of malaria——

"I couldn't find much the matter with him, but you know that type—puff! and the man's dead."

"I never liked him," Mrs. McCune observed, "he was a bully, and his friends were like him."

"Roaring fellows, eh?"

"Two men, they came once or twice, but when he got worse I kept them out."

"You would, Nurse!" Doctor Hamilton said, then he lowered his voice and there was sympathy in it. "And Mrs. Benton? She's a gentle little woman. What do you make of her? She was fond of him?"

"She rarely left him day or night. I had to make her go to bed—when I could. She watched over him, as though he were an ailing child."

"You'd better stay on for a few days till some one comes to look after her. You must notify her family. She's not fit for anything now."

"I know nothing of her family. I must ask her."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Then there are only the servants?"

"The Japanese boy. He sleeps here. Even when they were on their travels he took charge of the house. And there's a colored woman, the cook. She sleeps out."

"Luella. Yes. I've seen her. I suppose there is money, eh?"

"Oh, there must be money. They took this house a year ago. When they were married and furnished it—that cost money."

"I suppose it would," the doctor said, with an eye on the gaudy room; "it is the sort of thing money likes."

"I am sure she's been left all right. Anyway, there's his insurance for he told me about it."

"I'm glad of that. She's a strange little woman," Doctor Hamilton went on; all women were little from his view-point, "and gentle. The kind that needs to be taken care of, you know. Seems crushed; damn it, why do men make women like that? Dogs!"

"She is always very quiet and repressed, Doctor. You have noticed it, I see—and very strange at times. I am not sure, for I've never seen it—never seen her taking anything—but I have a suspicion—"

"H'm, you think so?"

"It may be drugs. Not ether. She couldn't hide that—"

"She couldn't hide any of them. Dope can not be hid—and you haven't really seen anything, no?"

"No, Doctor."

"I'll have a look at her now. Come."

Mrs. Benton's bedroom was dark when they entered. The nurse turned on the reading-lamp over the bed and the light fell on the woman who lay there, quiescent, with folded hands and half-closed

eyes. It was a rosy light, sifted through a rose-colored shade, and it gave an artificial glow, as of youthfulness, to the tragic face.

For the face was tragic. It seemed like a mask of tragedy, not terrible, but tense and sad. A sculptor might have modeled it that way and left it, fixed and unchanging.

When Doctor Hamilton spoke to her Mrs. Benton opened her eyes and looked at him steadily; she even smiled a little in recognition of his kindly words, but the smile made no change in the tragic face; it might have been a smile painted on a marble mask.

The eyes were pale, grayish, dull. There were long lashes to them, and over them eyebrows arched. And there was beauty in the face. The features were regular; they formed a kind of harmony, such as the ancient Greeks imaged in their faces of marble and bronze. In youth it must have been very beautiful; in old age it would affirm its original beauty; but now it was neither young nor old. It was fixed in agelessness—a mask. The hair was pushed back and fixed into a little lace cap; what there was to see of it seemed sand-colored, touched with gray, but that might have been due to the light.

Doctor Hamilton studied the woman. The nurse's suggestion that Mrs. Benton took some drug or other was in his mind. His examination was delicate and patient. No one spoke. For some time he had been holding her wrist; finally he laid

it down softly on the bed-cover. There was a good smile on his face. When he spoke there was satisfaction in his deep voice. And here in this room, bending over the stricken woman he was no longer boisterous and abrupt. There was extreme gentleness, more than professional, in his manner.

"It is only that you are all in, Mrs. Benton," he said, "you've carried on beyond your strength. I've been noticing it. You've been living on your store of vitality. And now nature has called a halt. You will have to relax and let go. You are a healthy woman. You'll come back all right. But now let go. The strain is over—there's no need for holding up now, let go. I'll give you something to insure a good night's rest and you will sleep."

"Yes, I shall sleep," Mrs. Benton murmured quietly, and she laid her hand on the doctor's arm confidently. "You are so very good to me. I do thank you. It is just as you said, I only need rest. But please do not make me take anything to put me to sleep. I am afraid of such drugs. Please, Doctor!"

She spoke pleadingly and once more she gave Doctor Hamilton that shallow fugitive smile.

"You are sure you can sleep?"

"Quite sure, Doctor, if I am left alone. But I must be quite alone. In the dark. It is what you said—strain, and now I am sure I can sleep, but if any one is near me—even you, dear Nurse—I shall keep thinking—thinking—"

"Perhaps you are right, Mrs. Benton. When did you eat last?"

"Nurse gave me some hot milk, when she helped me to bed. See, there is still some left."

"No one shall disturb you. Let go of all your thoughts. Of course you'll sleep. And I shall call in the morning. Good night, Mrs. Benton."

"You are both very good to me. I am not ill, only tired, very tired—"

She turned on her side toward the wall and her head sank deeper into the pillow. Doctor Hamilton paused for a moment, listening to her quiet breathing, then he went out. And when Mrs. McCune had put out the light, she closed the door of the bedroom and joined him in the hall.

"We shall see to everything in the morning, Nurse. All the formalities. I have arranged everything in there," and he indicated the room where the dead man lay. "You need not do anything. As for Mrs. Benton, she'll do all right. You were wrong about drugs. It is the strain. She's got to untie herself. I suspect the man was—but never mind. To-morrow you must find out about her family and telegraph—send for them. That's all. And you, my good woman, get to your bed. You've had enough on your shoulders. So have I. Well, to-morrow is another day. Good night. The Jap will let me out."

Doctor Hamilton watched the nurse go to her bedroom at the front. It was a little hall bedroom

facing the street. Then he opened the door of the room where he who had been Mr. Benton lay under a white cloth and was no longer Mr. Benton—was indeed merely a playground for the trooping death-fauna, already busy with their obscure activity.

Nakki was still in the room; he was near the window, the blinds of which were drawn down. He came toward Doctor Hamilton, smiling in his impersonal way.

"You want me to stay with him?" he asked brightly.

"Why?"

"With candles. And a priest. No, Doctor?"

"You can come down and lock up after me and then get to bed."

"Well, I shall do it. He was a fine man. He does not need to be watched. He will not do anything. He is dead. I have seen plenty of dead men. They never do anything," Nakki acquiesced blandly.

Doctor Hamilton looked Nakki over from head to foot as though he were a specimen—from the natty feet to the smiling yellow face with its black eyes glimmering behind the huge black-boned spectacles.

"You are a little queer devil," he remarked. "Now come on with you."

The key was on the inside of the door. When they were in the hall Nakki reached in, took the key, and locked the door from the outside.

"He will not come out," he whispered confidently, "for he is dead. But I lock the door. Why not?"

He left the key in the lock and followed the doctor down-stairs and let him out.

"Good-by," he said, smiling.

Doctor Hamilton grunted a good night and went swinging down the street.

The little Jap watched him, always with that exasperating and meaningless smile, until he was out of the house. Then he made fast the door. He trotted lightly up the stairs. Opposite the death-room he halted and made a swift gesture in the air; it was as though he were saying: "You stay there, Mr. Benton;" then he went up the narrow staircase to his little room above.

Having told himself to sleep without fear Nakki slept without fear.

And from the basement to the garret the Narrow House was dark and quiet—quiet as only two things are quiet, sleep and death.

As the night wore on even the sleepless New York streets seemed to share in the quietude. For a while at least this one spot in a world of noise was blanketed with stillness.

An hour, another hour; then there was a faint sound in the silent house. It was as though a door were being opened—sweeping over the carpet, perhaps, with a sound as indefinite as a whisper. Again there was silence, followed by almost noise-

less footsteps and the momentary creaking of the hand-rail on the stairs. There was no light, and through the darkness something, blacker than the darkness itself, moved slowly but without hesitation. It went down the stairs to the first floor and, more swiftly, along the hall and down into the basement. Silence once more; then the area-door grated, as it was drawn open.

Light from the street-lamp came in, outlining a dark form dressed in a woman's coat that fell long and black from neck to foot. It was a mere outline, for a veil hid the face and the gloved hands were not visible: a woman clothed in darkness.

She paused, seemingly listening—she heard no footsteps. Without apparent haste, she closed the basement door and went up the area-steps to the sidewalk.

The sidewalk was empty and the windows that looked down on it were dark. Lifting her veil, the woman glanced furtively to right and left. She was alone—unobserved; but as the glare of the street-lamp fell full upon her it revealed the pale face of Mrs. Benton. In another moment she had disappeared in the night.

And once more the Narrow House was quiet, with the quietude of sleep and death.

CHAPTER II

BURIED IN FIRE

IT WAS Nakki who opened the basement door the next morning and admitted Luella to her kitchen. The cook was a wholesome brown woman of thirty, with a plump body and iron-flattened hair. She took off a coat that looked like fur and covered herself with a long white apron.

"Yo had yo' tea?" she asked. "What you look-in' a' me fo'?"

The Japanese boy lingered, smiling. "You have lost something, Luella," he said calmly.

"What? What yo' talkin' about?"

"You have lost your boss."

"How come?"

"Mr. Benton. He is dead."

"Daid? Dat man daid? Whufore?"

"Last night," Nakki said, "he died—all over now."

Luella took a pot from the stove and lifted the lid.

"That's the very soup I was makin' fo' him," she remarked, "an' it's good soup. Some one got to eat it."

"Do you want to see him?" Nakki inquired.

"Why you ask that fool question? He ain't my people."

The white folk, who consumed her hours of work and payment, were no part of her emotional life—that belonged to the black tenements of rousing love and laughter and quarrel and tribal unity. A dead white man was only a white man dead—and the fear of him belonged to the other race: white ghosts never haunted colored folks. Luella was not afraid, but there was left curiosity.

"Perhaps I go see him," she said, "I never seen a red cawpse."

She put back the soup-pot and lighted the fire.

"I better make some coffee fo' Mrs. Benton. How is she, Nakki? She feelin' pretty bad?"

The cool voice of Nurse McCune stopped any reply Nakki might have given. She answered the question herself from the doorway:

"I have not disturbed her yet, Luella, but I trust she is sleeping. Nakki has told you? You'll do your best, Luella, won't you? We must all do what we can for her—it has been a great shock. Do not bring up her breakfast until I ring, Luella. And hot milk, please."

"Yes'm."

Leaving the servants, the nurse went up to Mrs. Benton's bedroom. For a second she stood at the door, listening. Seemingly she heard nothing, and quietly, lest she might disturb her patient's sleep, she

opened the door part way. The room was dark. Softly she went to the window and raised the shade, letting in the early daylight. Then she approached the bed.

Mrs. Benton was lying on her side, her face turned to the wall. As though she had sensed rather than heard the nurse's presence, she sat up in bed with a little cry.

"It is all right, it is all right," Mrs. McCune said soothingly. "Did I wake you?"

Mrs. Benton stared at her in a confused way.

"Perhaps," she said. "I do not know."

She drew her hands across her face two or three times. She seemed to be coming up slowly from some great depth of sleep.

"I did not know I could, Nurse, but I must have slept a long time."

"And you are better. I can see."

"Yes," and she lay back on the pillow with half-closed eyes.

She let herself be handled like a child as Mrs. McCune, in the implacable way of a nurse for whom nothing is mysterious, made her morning toilet for her and forced her to eat her breakfast of dry toast and hot milk flavored with coffee. Mrs. Benton was grateful but apathetic. The strain had gone and left behind it, seemingly, mere weariness—indifference—a disinclination for taking hold of the facts of life. The nurse, remembering the promise made to Doctor Hamilton, questioned her about her family and her friends.

"You must send for them at once, you know."

"But I have no one, no one."

"Every one has some one," Mrs. McCune said bluntly.

"There is no one," persisted Mrs. Benton wearily, "but I want to tell you everything. You are so good."

"Good or not it is my business to take care of you. And things have to be attended to, you know. Surely your parents—"

But Bertha Benton's parents were dead long ago, she explained. She had lived with an old aunt, in a western city—that was in Ohio. And when the aunt died she had come on to New York. To study. There was a dramatic school. She meant to work hard. She had money enough to go on for a while, and she did study and work.

Mrs. Benton spoke without hesitation but without apparent interest in what she was saying. Now and then she glanced sidewise at her companion through half-closed eyes.

And then she had met Dick Benton. No one introduced her. She had just met him. It happened. And she married him a year ago. A year ago. They had been happy. Or had they? Being married was a strange thing, but she was glad to marry him, Dick Benton. They traveled everywhere. But not in Europe. She had always dreamed of that since she was a little girl. Nurse McCune was a long time drawing this story out

of the apathetic woman, who seemed to be talking of a life that was so definitely past it was no longer a part of her. Practical, common-sense questions brought little more information. Mrs. Benton had no friends she cared about, she insisted, no family or relatives. And Dick had been just like her, alone. He had some friends, one or two, but she had never liked them. He had broken with his family years ago. She did not know anything about them. He had never told her. But perhaps the friends would come. And money? She was afraid Dick had spent his own money and most of hers, too. It was the racing. That was all he cared for and all he did. It was why they went to Cuba, where he fell ill. But the money did not matter. Dick had taken care of her. There was insurance money. Oh, a great deal. That was her wedding present—the only one she received. He had taken out the policy shortly after they were married. He was always thinking of protecting her. People who did not know him well might think he was rough, but she knew that he was always thinking of her and her happiness. Oh, if it hadn't been for the racing and for his friends and the drink they made him take! But no one knew how thoughtful he was for her.

Shadowy facts; the story of a colorless life; the girl from some little city, who had come up to town, ambitious for fame or eager to break the monotony of life, and the noisy roistering man who swept her

off her feet and made of her—this! And this, Nurse McCune decided was a woman who had been cowed and driven in on herself, and had not yet dared come out and see that she was free, a free unit, a free woman. Probably she had friends, a family; it might be something—her marriage perhaps—that made her hold off from them. Anyway there had been a marriage. It had taken place in New York. Mrs. McCune had seen the certificate, as she had seen the other papers confirming the account of a heavy life-insurance. Richard Benton had carried on his shoulders for a year fifty thousand dollars for his wife's sake; and now, unless she were fool enough to waste it, she was safe from want as long as she lived. But could she take care of her fortune? Mrs. McCune wondered if the young woman could take care of herself—even of the clothes and food and common shelter of life. 'A feckless woman! For hours she would sit brooding over a book—and a book of verse at that!

"Some one has to see her through," the nurse told Doctor Hamilton later in the day, as they sat talking again in the parlor of the Narrow House. He had visited his patient and found her resting quietly enough, propped up on pillows in her bed. The light hurt her eyes, she said, and the curtains were half closed. She had told the doctor she was better, but tired all over inside and out; so he had ordered her the rest she needed most. And now he was striding about the gaudy parlor, teasing his

beard and agreeing with Nurse McCune that some one would have to see her through.

"It's probably all rubbish about her having neither family nor friends," he declared, "but I dare say there is a reason. Family quarrel, doubtless. And family quarrels are bitter queer things. Marriage to that kind of a husband would explain a lot of reticence. And so you couldn't get anything out of her?"

What the nurse had been able to learn of Mrs. Benton's life she had already repeated to Doctor Hamilton, and she went over it again.

"I dare say it's all true enough," he remarked, "only she has kept a lot back, poor little woman. The most illogical thing about women is the lengths they'll go in protecting a bad husband. Oh, I don't mean Benton especially. He seemed all right—just plain bully. And waster as you said. Well, Nurse, you know what is to be done. Do it."

Mrs. McCune knew very well what had to be done, when death steps in and takes a man. There was the doctor's certificate of death and that was at hand. She had already telephoned for the funeral director. He was on his way.

"What kind of a funeral, Nurse?"

"Mrs. Benton wants it to be quiet. You see there is no one. There are two of his friends; she has asked me to notify them. And the landlord. She mentioned him."

"Religion?"

"Oh, I do not think she wants anything of that kind. He was not that sort. If you had heard him talk sometimes as I did—"

"I heard enough from him."

"But of course there will have to be something. A few words from some one, no matter what he thought of such things."

"Dust to dust, you know. Yes, I agree with you, Nurse. Speak to Mrs. Benton again. And to the funeral director."

"He is to be taken to the undertaker's rooms. There's a kind of chapel there. I'll talk to her again. She is just indifferent."

"Where is he to be buried? That will have to be seen to."

"No, he is to be cremated, Doctor."

"What's that?"

"Cremated, Doctor."

Doctor Hamilton was still prowling restlessly about the room; he glanced over his shoulder at the nurse, as he passed her, and asked: "Who decided that?"

"He did. He told me again and again. He seemed to have it on his mind. Even when I first came here and did not believe he was very ill, he spoke of it. He said it was frightful to think of a body being covered up with earth and lying there—for years—"

"Well?"

"I've often had patients talk that way. Of

course I laughed and told him he would probably outlive us all, but he made it clear enough what he wanted done in case—well, in case anything happened to him was the way he put it.”

“And what does Mrs. Benton say to this?”

“She was in the room once when he talked about it—perhaps she heard him say it more than once, for she rarely left the room, after he took to his bed. I spoke to her this morning. She seemed indifferent as usual. She isn’t herself yet. But he wanted it, I know. And really,” Nurse McCune added in her common-sense way, “it is more sanitary. And more modern.”

“It is what she thinks about it,” the doctor observed; he had picked up his hat and gloves from a chair and made ready to go.

“She doesn’t seem to think about that or anything else. I’ll even have to get her some proper clothes. The things she has won’t do.”

“All right, Nurse, you know what to do. I’ll look in later.”

Unquestionably Mrs. McCune knew what to do. She was as familiar with the sad routine of death as with the obscure processes of life. And within three days all was over. A little funeral procession of black motor-cars traversed the city and crossed the long bridge. It consisted of a hearse so inconspicuous it might have been carrying anything but what it carried in its dark interior—a few flowers and a large casket of dark wood. Behind it fol-

lowed, as best they could, four cars. The crêpe-covered figure in the first car was the widow and with her was Nurse McCune. In the second car rode Doctor Hamilton and a bright-eyed little old man who seemed to be comforting himself with the thought that he was following a hearse with some one else in it. He was Mr. Selbin, the owner of the house wherein Richard Benton had died.

"Very prompt he was," Mr. Selbin remarked, as though he were composing an epitaph for his former tenant, "no check, but ready money on the day. A noble character of a man."

Two men in black coats and gloves, exhibiting unnecessary diamonds and smoking good cigars, occupied the third car. One was a shade fatter than the other. It was he who was saying:

"A good old sport, Jackie, he was a good old sport."

"He was. Not much head but a good sport."

"How long did you know him?"

"About a year or so, you remember—we was up to Saratoga, Jackie."

"Sure, I remember. Queer how quick it takes 'em."

"Him? I often told him. Boozé did it. I says to him over to Havana one day, 'It's all right here. The stuff is good. You can lap it up. It makes a king of you,' says I, 'but not in N'York. Cut it out there or it'll get you—it's rottener than poison no matter what you pay for it,' says I."

"Rot! There's plenty of good stuff if you know!"

"But you don't know. Nobody can ever tell an' if you get a bad lot—there you are, like him, Jackie. That's what he done an' I told him. Says I: 'Dick, cut it out. You're ridin' for a fall.' Well, he fell all right. Ask me! It takes 'em all."

"How was he fixed."

"Money? Him? It's hard to tell about them bluffy fellows. He sure was a high talker, Jackie."

"He done his best," said the man called Jackie, "he done his best," as though he, too, were thinking in terms of an epitaph, "an' he never done me out of anything."

"Nor me. He was a good old scout, that Benton person, an' I sure liked him."

In the fourth car Nakki was repeating his familiar ecomium:

"He was a very fine man. Too bad."

And Luella, dressed in black, with a small black hat crowded down on her flattened hair and powder on her solemn brown face, added her comment: "It is certainly a fine cawpse. Fo' a red cawpse it is a sure beautiful cawpse. I'll say, that fo' Mistah Benton."

Then the ride ended.

While the mourners stood in deep silence in the little waiting-room, the body was trundled into a cold vault. The steel shutter of the aperture was

closed upon it. 'And Richard Benton lay alone, terribly alone, shut off from them all, in his narrow cave of darkness and silence. And then the vault was no longer cold. So fierce a heat woke within it that, minute by minute, what had been the body Richard Benton walked the earth in—the gross body he had filled with meat and drink and taken his arrogant joy in—evaporated like water spilled in the sun. In an hour there was left only a handful of pearl-colored ashes, purified, anonymous, dead.

The mourners went away. Doctor Hamilton rode back in the car with Mrs. Benton, alone. She drooped in a corner. For a moment their car was halted by the traffic. The doctor took her hand and unbuttoned the black glove; the pulse was beating steadily; he counted it, looking at his watch—five, six, seven—

Suddenly the pulse leaped as though the very blood in her veins was wild with panic and fear.

“What is it?” Doctor Hamilton exclaimed.

Mrs. Benton, bent forward now, was staring at an automobile which had ranged up along side of them, but the doctor did not see the two men in it—the glimmer of faces behind glass—before the car shot ahead and was lost in the traffic. He had thought only for the woman. She clutched his arm and clung to him, her face drawn with terror. He tried to calm her with reassuring words: “Steady—there is no danger—tell me what it is—”

She had been shocked to the depths by those faces, seen in the window, and his voice did not seem to reach her; and before Doctor Hamilton realized it he was holding in his arms an unconscious woman.

CHAPTER III

THE WIDOW.

IT WAS precisely ten o'clock when Bertha Benton, accompanied, or rather shepherded, by Mrs. McCune, entered the building of the Great Orient Insurance Company in Broadway.

The day without was wintry, a cold wind running seaward, and both women were wrapped in furs. The widow was all in black—black cloth, black furs, a black veil. She leaned on the nurse's arm, as she moved forward slowly, with lowered head and eyes that looked neither to right nor left. Mrs. McCune, on the contrary, presented a picture of all that was efficient and practical, with her tailored tweeds and fur-trimmed coat and hat. It was she who led the way and took every initiative until at last they found themselves in the waiting-room of the Claim Department.

"We shall have to wait. Not long, I hope," she said, "it's a Mr. Ringgold we shall have to see."

She glanced at a memorandum slip and then took some papers from her bag and held them ready in her hand.

"Your headache hasn't come back, Mrs. Benton?"

"No, I am quite well now."

"They keep these offices too hot," Mrs. McCune observed testily, throwing open her coat, "but there's nothing to do but wait. We are early enough and there is no one before us. I trust he is not already engaged. Ringgold—that is the name. He is head of the department."

"It is very good of you to take all this trouble," Mrs. Benton said softly. "I do not know what I should have done, alone."

"I am glad to help you and it is all very simple. Don't worry," and she touched the widow's hand protectively.

Then they sat in silence.

Meanwhile Mr. George Ringgold was sitting in front of his broad office table upon which lay many papers, folded, or in orderly piles. His writing utensils were neatly aligned and the blotting-paper was virginal. He had been dictating letters to the calm girl who was his stenographer and after her departure he paused before taking up his appointment list. It was his habit now and then to steal a few moments from the time owned by the Great Orient Insurance Company to think of himself not without approbation.

He was not an old man; that is, he was about thirty-five or six; and his pleasant reflection was that he had made of his life pretty near what he wanted to make of it. Head of the Claim Department of the Great Orient! That was something;

and now at thirty-five—young-looking at that! He was a stocky active man, with chestnut-colored hair, where it had not thinned away on top of his head. His short-sighted eyes looked rather peeringly through the thick lenses of his eye-glasses. And he appeared to be just what he was: a reliable and conscientious worker, proud of his job and proud, too, of himself, because he was part of that huge organization. He had no ambition which was not connected with the Great Orient Insurance Company and with his career in it. He had received his business training in a western company, the "New State." It had been slow going, but he might have clung to his job out there on the Pacific Coast and jogged on without future had it not been for The Girl—the girl who said no.

What he got out of this short romance was a new ambition. He had wanted to go somewhere, do things, rise in the world. And this determination, added to the queer luck that always accompanies discarded lovers, carried him on to New York and to the Great Orient Insurance Company—surely peerless in a world of insurance—and on and on to the headship of the Claim Department. And George Ringgold was happy. His passion for the girl had been transformed into passionate devotion for the company. He loved it because his loyal little soul had to love something and he worked for it as a man works for himself, because the company and he were one. They lived together. He had no other

interests. And each day found him the same loyal man of business, gripping his job and loving it, reaching up above it, and quite happy as he toiled methodically in the shadow of his idol: the Great Orient.

He picked up the appointment list.

Even during the excursion into the background of his life it had never really been out of his mind. And now he was once more the flawless part of the great machine.

He summoned his clerk. "Take them in order," he said referring to the waiting list, and picked up the papers on the top of the pile.

He was scanning them when the two women were shown in and given chairs facing him at the table. He looked up with admirably assumed sympathy. It was not a bore of course, for it was inconceivable that the business of the Great Orient could ever bore him, but it was after all a matter of routine and he knew the type and the story so well; it rarely varied save in details; but of course he would have to hear it. The widow in black and the other woman, as usual. Probably a lawyer in the offing; he wished he were in the room.

"Mrs. Benton? I am glad you were able to come. We had your letter."

Mrs. Benton thanked him; her voice was quiet and low.

"It was I who wrote to you about it," the nurse interposed.

"And you, excuse me, you are—"

"Janet McCune, trained nurse. Doctor Hamilton engaged me and I was with Mr. Benton until he died. And now I am caring for Mrs. Benton—and she needs me."

"Yes, Mrs. McCune is my friend, too," the widow said, "and she was good enough to come with me. She knows everything."

Mrs. McCune hitched her chair closer to the table, leaving the veiled figure farther in the background. She slapped down the papers she had been holding on the table in front of her, as she began to relate the simple facts concerning the claim on the Great Orient. She spoke tersely, outlining the story of Mrs. Benton's life, her ordinary antecedents, her marriage and widowhood. Mr. Ringgold listened with businesslike courtesy. So often he had heard that sort of thing—a fragment of life at once dolorous and commonplace. His daily food was death and bereavement. But could he have seen, at that moment, into the future, he would have known that Mrs. McCune's statement consisted not of words alone—blunt words that might be spoken or written—but that it was the very fabric out of which drama, romance, even tragedy are spun.

But how should he know?

The future was for him darker even than the veil that shrouded the face of the young widow sitting there in his every-day office. Had he

known, his trained and careful little soul would have run wild, as it had once when love snatched at him; but no premonition broke the calm of his humdrum thoughts. Quite casually he put the usual questions. With his wonted care he read the policy which Mrs. McCune handed to him. It had been taken out by Richard Benton in favor of his wife, Bertha Benton. It was for fifty thousand dollars. And now, Richard Benton being dead, his wife claimed the money.

"This is your signature?" he inquired.

"Yes," Mrs. Benton replied.

"And you attended the deceased in his last illness, Mrs. McCune?"

"I've already told you that. I was called in by Doctor Hamilton, two weeks before he died. And I was with him until the end."

"Yes, yes, very good," Mr. Ringgold observed reflectively, "quite right."

Once more he carefully inspected the policy and then as though moved by a sudden impulse he went to a cabinet in the corner of his room and returned with a blank form on which was printed: "Signature of Claimant."

"I will ask you to sign this, please," he said, addressing Mrs. Benton.

Laying the slip on the desk he handed her a fountain-pen.

"Will you kindly sit here?"

He spoke pleasantly, with great politeness, but the young woman rose with a start, pushing back

her chair; and as she stood up the veil which had hidden her face, fell back. And Mr. Ringgold, standing pen in hand, stared at this face, so suddenly revealed.

"Mrs. Benton," he said vaguely.

Recognition seemed to be dawning in his short-sighted eyes.

"But—where have we met before?"

The woman's face was troubled. Her pallor and her black attire gave her a pathetic air of fragility and helplessness, but her wide steady eyes met his without flinching.

Gravely, almost regretfully, she murmured: "You are mistaken. I do not know you."

"But I know you, Mrs. Benton. Where have we met?" Ringgold persisted, "I can not be mistaken. I have to remember things—and faces and names. I have met you. Where? I shall remember in a moment. I always do remember."

Mrs. McCune felt an angry sense of uneasiness. All this had nothing to do with the business in hand. What was the silly man driving at? Why was he staring at Mrs. Benton with hard inquisitorial eyes?

She stood up abruptly and went to her patient's side. "Does all this matter?" she demanded abruptly, "suppose you did see her before? When she came with her husband about the policy in the first place?"

Mrs. Benton glanced gratefully at her friend, but Ringgold turned his eyes that way with quite another expression in them.

"I was on my vacation when the policy was signed," he said shortly, referring to the date, "and anyway she would not have to come to this department."

"Does it make any difference?" the nurse exclaimed sharply.

"No—no—and of course I may be mistaken," and turning once more to Mrs. Benton, he repeated, "Will you please sign this slip?"

She drew off her glove, took the pen and rapidly signed her name: "Bertha Benton."

Mr. Ringgold compared the signature with that on the policy. Then without speaking he took a package of forms from a drawer of his table and sorting out five of them said: "These are the usual blanks, five in number. They must be filled in and signed before a notary public by the undertaker, the physician who attended the deceased, two disinterested friends who knew him in life and saw him after his demise, and finally, Mrs. Benton, by you."

He handed her the papers, and as he did so, he looked keenly at her downcast face. Her eyes were averted. She was very pale, cold, without sign of animation. But the troubled look had passed away. As she took the documents she thanked him in a few words.

"I'll take care of those papers, my dear," Mrs. McCune said, and she put them in her businesslike leather bag, "and now I suppose we can go, Mr. Ringgold?"

"Yes, that is all for to-day. Return the papers at your convenience," Ringgold replied courteously.

"As soon as possible," the nurse promised, taking her patient's arm. "She is not very strong yet. I must get her home. Well, thank you. I've left a card there on your table with our house address and the telephone number."

Mr. Ringgold opened the door for them with a polite bow. He stood watching them as they traversed the waiting-room and went out into the hall beyond. When the door closed behind them he returned to his office and sitting down at his table inspected the slip on which the young widow had just signed her name. Apparently it told him nothing. For a while he sat there, brooding, tapping the table. But surely he had seen that face. Known it. Where? Here in New York? In other days in Los Angeles? Suddenly he straightened up and got to his feet.

Memory was awake.

And this memory sent the blood from his face and left it sallow. He dropped back into his chair. Elbow on desk, his head leaning on his hand, he drooped there, buried in thought. And bit by bit the recollection came back, a series of facts and events linked one to the other, vivid, authentic.

"If that is so," and he spoke the words half aloud, "I must have a note, a letter, something from her."

Distinctly he remembered that on one occasion

she had written him to postpone an appointment he had made with her. He had certainly kept her note. It was his habit to keep every scrap of paper that came to him; one never knows. He went to the cabinet and unlocked the drawer containing his private papers, all neatly folded, dated, bound with rubber bands. It did not take him any great time to find what he was seeking. It was a black-bordered envelope. It had not been sent through the post, but the date of its delivery, neatly written by Mr. Ringgold, was on the left hand corner; an old date over five years ago. The envelope in hand, Mr. Ringgold reseated himself. He took out the letter and spread it before him; it read:

“Dear Mr. Ringgold.

“I am sorry I can not keep my appointment to-day. But I am ill and unable to leave the house. Believe me I am sorry for all the trouble I have given you. I shall call if possible Tuesday at the same hour.

“Yours sincerely,

“Beth Forsythe.”

He studied the handwriting. It was a loose and careless script, hurriedly dashed off, it would seem, and in no way resembled the straight, firm handwriting of the signature Mrs. Benton had placed upon the slip. No resemblance. More than disappointment showed in his clouded face. No, they were not the same; they were not even similar; and yet he was sure he was not mistaken—

some certainty deeper than his knowledge told him he was not mistaken. If he were one to act upon hasty impulse he would lay the case before the comptroller of the company at once. A glow of pride surged up in him as he thought of the sensation he would make were he to do so. And then what a service to the company! His company. Dreams of promotion tugged at him.

But the handwritings—

They should have been alike—some unconcealed resemblance apparent to the trained observer—and they were not alike. Even the capital *B*'s in the note and in the signature bore no hint of similarity. Nothing. He puzzled over them with troubled eyes. No; and yet—

And yet the woman was no other than the one to whom his company in Los Angeles had paid ten thousand dollars of insurance money on the death of her husband, five years ago.

And the circumstances of that case were similar, in almost every respect, to those of to-day: a year or so of marriage; a strong man crumbling up suddenly; then death and the young widow, quiet and pallid in her black garments, claiming the money. Not Bertha Benton that time; the name of that widow in the West was Beth Forsythe. In that case, moreover, she had not been accompanied by a trained nurse. Mr. Ringgold remembered well enough the man who had come with her, a big fellow—he would know him.

Different names. Different handwriting. And the same woman.

He would swear to that.

With sudden resolution he knocked at the door of the comptroller's office.

CHAPTER IV

GRAPHOMETRY

MR. GEORGE RINGGOLD made no error of judgment, when he laid the facts of the Benton case before the comptroller of the Great Orient. The wheels of the huge implacable machinery of investigation and control began to move. One agent was sent to the little Ohio town, where Bertha Benton claimed she had been born and had lived out her girlhood with her parents and then with an aunt; and another man out in Los Angeles was looking into the Forsythe case. In each of these cases—one on the eastern rim of the continent and the other on the western rim—the same woman, Ringgold was certain, had been the woman to whom the insurance money had been paid. She, in each instance, had been the widow, black-garbed, white of face, with hand outstretched for the death money. George Ringgold would swear to it; he knew; his memory held!

The head of the legal department, Mr. Steeger, took up his end of it. One of his first moves was to talk it over with the advisory counsel of the company, Faynis, Cleave and Faynis.

He was sitting in a deep leather chair, this morning, in the private office of John Faynis. There was a lighted cigar in his hand. White-haired, verging on fat, Mr. Steeger was a comfortable sort of old man, physically somewhat lazy, but keen-witted and intelligent. A round man and a sound man. Near him sat George Ringgold, keyed-up and important. He felt he was carrying weight.

"No report from Ohio yet?" Faynis asked; he was standing near the window, looking out, now and then, at the stone lanes of lower New York; and beyond, a glimpse of tumbled water and ships. He was an athletic-looking man, still young, rather dark, with a good lean face such as any man might wear with satisfaction; the eyes were remarkable in a way—set far apart and rarely wide open. Half-veiled eyes; as though he meant to see all there was to be seen, without permitting any one to read the thoughts he might be thinking.

"Not yet, Faynis," Mr. Steeger answered the question, "if a report comes in I've asked them to send it on to me here, if it arrives before noon. I knew you'd be keen on it."

"And the other end? The Forsythe policy."

"There's a man coming on from Los Angeles. One of the 'New State' lot. What's his name, Mr. Ringgold?"

"Cross. It's Edward Cross."

"Yes. He can identify Mrs. Forsythe. He saw her many times in the office out there. And

the man who was with her. Not that Mr. Ringgold has any doubt about it, but we want to hear what the man Cross has to say. Naturally the 'New State' is as keen on the case as we are."

"It looks like a plain case," Faynis observed, with one of his rare smiles, "and for that very reason, as a wise friend of mine used to say, it probably isn't."

"Simple," returned Steeger, rolling in his chair and reaching for another cigar. "I don't see anything very simple about it. One woman and two dead men and two companies hit hard. That is not a simple game to play. It takes a bit of playing."

"Most games do," Faynis said, "but as that wise friend of mine used to say—"

At that moment his desk-telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Well? Who? No. I can't get the name. Spell it? What! Show him in—certainly."

Faynis hung up the receiver.

"Steeger," he said, "that's odd. He's the man I've been talking about—the wise man. I knew he was coming over, but I didn't know he had arrived. You'll want to see him."

"Who is it?"

But already the door had opened.

An office boy effaced himself. Standing in the doorway was a neat little man, holding carefully in his left hand a round black hat. He came forward, bowing, smiling.

"Mr. Guelpa!" Faynis exclaimed, and got him by the hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Faynis. I am disturbing you?"

"No, no. I am delighted to see you. I've just been talking about you. This is Mr. Steeger. Mr. Ringgold—Mr. Guelpa, of Paris."

"How do you do," Mr. Guelpa beamed on one man and then on the other, but he did not shake hands. Instead he bowed.

"Take this chair, Mr. Guelpa. I am mighty glad to see you. And give me your hat," Faynis went on.

"No, I'll keep it," Mr. Guelpa replied. Then he sat down, and after inspecting his hat—a perfectly new hat—he laid it carefully on his knee.

"Your name is introduction enough, Mr. Guelpa," and Faynis turned toward the fat man in the chair, "eh, Steeger?"

"I've got his books," Steeger remarked, "in fact, Mr. Guelpa, I not only have them, I have read them. That theory of yours that human evidence is almost always false—always warped—never wholly convincing—there's something in it."

"You think so?" Mr. Guelpa remarked blandly; he turned to Faynis.

"I wrote you a letter," he said.

"Yes, and I would have met you if I had known your boat. My wife will be glad to see you. And Mrs. Guelpa and your daughter?"

"They are here. At the hotel."

"Mrs. Faynis will call on them, of course."

Steeger had not felt that he was snubbed off. Well enough he knew who this little man was, and the part he had played in the world-wide battle against the forces of crime. Pretty nearly all that is known, to-day, of the scientific investigation of crime had been in Mr. Guelpa's brain, he knew, before it got into practise and into books. Those volumes on technical research, on identification of criminals, on poroscopy, on traces and imprints and laboratory analysis were in every library of criminology.

For thirty years Mr. Guelpa had been at the head of the Technical Police Laboratory of Lyons and precisely there and then the modern science of criminology had been born.

And Mr. Guelpa was the midwife of that gigantic birth.

World over he had been called in to establish similar institutions for the detection of crime—from that of San Paolo in Brazil to that of Rabat in Morocco; world-over, too, his methodology of crime was being accepted, in reluctant New York and London, even as in Buenos Aires. Steeger knew it. Mr. Guelpa's new science stood up big as a tower. One couldn't get away from that. And not only could he talk and write about crime detection; the little man could do what he talked about: the acid test.

Steeger remembered how Mr. Guelpa had untangled the mysterious de Granlieu case, over in Paris, when Eva Ryle the "American countess" had stood in peril of her life. And the Cole case in the Argentine and many others.

"Mr. Guelpa," Steeger said, "there will be a good many people over here anxious to see you. That is the penalty of fame."

"And perhaps some who won't be so keen on seeing him," Faynis remarked.

"No, no, Mr. Faynis. I have come to see the men who will want to see me. Beyond doubt. Your great men. Ah, what men you have! I know what they write. Now I shall meet them. It is all arranged. Three men."

"Who are they, Mr. Guelpa?"

"Osborn. His book on *Documents* is a landmark, eh? and Ledsky, who wrote *Manuel*. And—ah, that other? A difficult name. Persifer Frazer, who makes the composite photographs of handwriting. They are your great men. And when I have talked with them I shall go home directly—and finish my own book."

Talkative and affable, Mr. Guelpa nursed his little hat on his knee, and smiled politely. Mr. Ringgold from his seat, a trifle distant, peered at him curiously. He didn't think much of foreigners and the little man was not very impressive anyway. He was surprised at Mr. Steeger's next remark and his face darkened with disapproval. What Mr.

Steeger said was: "We've just been talking over a case that I think would interest you. Eh, Faynis?"

"Thank you, Steeger. You've broken the ice. I was about to ask Mr. Guelpa what he thought of it."

The little man's refusal was prompt.

"No, no, I can do nothing. I am here for one purpose—and three men. I can not stay long. When I have studied their methods, their experiments, I shall go."

"Anyway, Faynis, I am sure Mr. Guelpa would like to hear the facts," Steeger insisted.

"Facts? Ah, I am always glad to listen. And then what can I refuse my friend, Mr. Faynis?"

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Guelpa. And you know what your opinion means to me."

Faynis was at his desk. He sifted his papers for a moment and then in cold clear sentences began to state his case. At first, as the lawyer commenced to relate the story of the conspiracy, as he saw it, against the Great Orient and that other company out West, Mr. Guelpa manifested no special interest. He merely sat there, staring at his hat, his hands quite still, his face expressionless. Ringgold from his chair watched him with disapproval. This little man was shockingly foreign. From his smart, buttoned-up black coat billowed a bright-colored neck-tie, decorated with a big agate pin. That was annoying. And then there was that neat mustache, so patently dyed an impossible kind of purple black,

while the wisps of hair on the bony head were grayish-white. The eyebrows, which should have been white also, were the color of the mustache. It was all wrong; it was foreign. The old face, with its network of multiple wrinkles, had no meaning. And yet Ringgold waited impatiently for his own name to be brought into the story.

The woman's name was pronounced first.

"You see this Bertha Benton is the crux of the case," Faynis was saying.

"Ah, the woman!"

Mr. Guelpa laid his hat carefully on the table, then he straightened up in his chair. An alert look shot across the wrinkled face and made it young, and the leaden eyes behind the pince-nez brightened into steel.

"The same woman?"

"Undoubtedly. Although she denies it."

"Have I all the facts?" Mr. Guelpa asked briskly, "like this: Five years ago a man dies in Los Angeles. Yes? His widow is paid the life-insurance money which was her due. It is so? Now another man dies in New York and his widow claims from your company a very large sum of money. You are suspicious. It appears from your records that the New York widow has an entirely different life-story from that of the one who received the money from the other company. She was married in New York, but not as a widow. No? It was, she stated, her first marriage. But if she did

not tell the truth, eh? If she was that other woman? 'Ah, then you say it looks very bad. Well?'

Mr. Guelpa had spoken rapidly. His English, like that of most foreigners who speak the language well, was just a trifle more formal than that of the every-day citizen, but he had the Gallic way of putting his remarks in the form of questions. It was Steeger who answered him.

"That sort of thing has been done," he remarked, "we are always on the look-out."

"As to Mrs. Benton," Faynis said, "we already have a good deal to go on. Mr. Ringgold, here, is fairly certain she is the same woman who appeared as claimant in the Forsythe case in Los Angeles. He was with the other company then and he has an excellent memory."

Mr. Guelpa turned toward the efficient head of the Claim Department of the Great Orient, with a friendly smile.

"Ah, Mr. Ringgold. A witness. To identification. Yes. He has seen a woman. He has fixed an image of her in his memory. Now he has seen a woman once more. He compares the images. They are identical. Two wonderful faculties—to be able to see and to remember. What did you see, Mr. Ringgold, and what do you remember?"

Mr. Guelpa beamed as though the one thing on earth he really loved was a witness and as though in Mr. Ringgold he had at last discovered his perfect specimen.

"I recognized her," the witness answered anxiously, for he feared the little man's smile. "The company I was with in Los Angeles paid her ten thousand dollars. It was a pure coincidence that I should have been here with the Great Orient, five years later, when she appeared under another name with this new claim for fifty thousand. I knew I had met her, although she denied it. At first I was not just sure when I had known her; but after she had left I remembered."

"Memory came back. The image. Yes, continue, please."

"I remembered. She was the woman I knew first as Mrs. Forsythe," Ringgold went on with a hint of defiance. "She had made an impression on me out there—she was very young and seemed to take the death of her husband very hard. There is such a thing as sympathy, Mr. Guelpa, even in business."

"Yes, that would help. So you are quite certain?"

"Yes, and I remember the man who accompanied her. He was big and arrogant, so I remember him well enough."

"You would know him?"

"Anywhere."

"Continue, please."

"After Mrs. Benton had left my office I got to thinking. There was the resemblance and then it flashed upon me."

"Yes."

"I had received a letter from the Forsythe woman in Los Angeles."

"Yes," interposed Faynis, "you might tell us about that once more, Mr. Ringgold."

"A letter? There would be letters, of course. Pray tell me," Mr. Guelpa said softly, but there was cold scrutiny in his gray eyes as he bent them toward the man of memory.

"Once I was sure of the woman, it occurred to me I might have a note from her among my personal papers. I seemed to have it in mind that she had written to me about an appointment. When I found it, I—"

"Pardon, Mr. Ringgold," interrupted Faynis, "here is the letter."

He opened the folded paper and handed it to Mr. Guelpa.

"Thank you." But Mr. Guelpa did not look at the letter; as though unconsciously his active fingers refolded it into envelope shape and always he scrutinized the important face of this one man who had seen and remembered and was, so far, the only witness in the case.

"And of course you compared the handwriting with the writing of Mrs. Benton. Yes?"

"I had only her signature to go on."

"Quite enough. Shall I tell you what you found? *You found the handwritings were totally different.*"

It was one of the dramatic incidents Mr. Guelpa enjoyed; he laughed softly to himself, as he noted Steeger's surprise and the smiling acquiescence of John Faynis.

"Of course they are not the same. It can not be possible you thought they would be, Mr. Ringgold?"

"I hoped they would be, sir."

"It would have meant our case," Steeger put in bluntly, "or a good bit of it."

"I do not agree with you, Mr. Steeger, but let me see the signature of Mrs. Benton," the little man said abruptly.

He opened the note signed Beth Forsythe, read it slowly, held it up against the light and then laid it face up on the desk. He spent more time inspecting the signature of Bertha Benton. Then he laid the two papers side by side. He was standing now at the table, bent over, looking first at one and then at the other. At last he picked up an ebony ruler. He laid it flat on the letter, moving it at varying angles, and repeated the process with the slip of paper on which the Benton signature was written. The three men were all standing near him, watching every move.

"You are right, quite right," Mr. Guelpa said, straightening up, and beaming on Mr. Ringgold with affable eyes, "they are utterly dissimilar. And you know that is curious, isn't it? For—"

Mr. Guelpa continued, still smiling—"they were written by the identical, the same hand!"

CHAPTER V

"EVIDENCE POURS IN"

MR. GUELPA had installed himself in an old-fashioned hotel in Fifth Avenue near Washington Square. Gloom had long ago settled upon it, though in the days when New York tippled openly, it had been as reelingly gay as any nook in the old town. It still maintained its fame as the place where one could really dine. And it was French. The book-stall in the lobby was yellow with paper-covered volumes. The servants were French. It offered Mrs. Guelpa a little bit of home. She had been baffled, anywhere else, by the almost universal conspiracy of New Yorkers not to speak her native tongue. In the old dark rooms she found the kind of comfort she was used to, and, out-of-doors, her daughter Julie's English was good enough to make shopping possible. Then there was Mrs. Faynis, a friend of Parisian days. And there were concerts. And this afternoon it was to be the Philharmonic, for Mrs. Guelpa was a musician.

She turned from the tall mirror in their sitting-room, with a last admiring glance at the image she saw there. She was a tall, dark, commanding wo-

man, gloomily handsome; and she radiated personality—a rich and troubled kind of personality which might have befitted a prima donna rather than the wife of Mr. Guelpa. One wondered how she had ever become the mother of the round blonde girl, suave and placid as cream, who stood at the window looking down into the avenue, where processional automobiles and motor-buses passed. Julie had the beauty of her eighteen years.

“There’s the car,” she said; it was the familiar Faynis car, which had called for them.

“Tell your father.”

“Yes, mother.”

She tapped at the door of an adjoining room.

“Fa-ather,” she announced, “mother is waiting.”

“Waiting, my dear, that’s too bad,” Mr. Guelpa exclaimed, bustling in, “I am sorry.”

“Are you not coming with us, Jules-Marie?” his wife said, in her somber way. “Although I could not expect that of you.”

“But you know of my appointment? Professor Ledsky is coming. I showed you the charming letter from that great man—I am sorry,” Mr. Guelpa apologized, “and anyway Mrs. Faynis is to meet you at the concert.”

“I had thought, Jules-Marie, this was to be a holiday and that, like other women, I might have a husband, for this once.”

“The holiday, my dear, is for you and Julie. You forget my book. And then, Hortense, just at present I am interested in a—woman.”

"Fa-ather!" Julie exclaimed, and she and her stepfather waited, in complicity, for a temperamental comment from Mrs. Guelpa. That ample lady disappointed them. She merely glanced at the natty little man with the dyed mustache and twinkling eyes, shrugged her shoulders and went to the door. Mr. Guelpa opened it, and as they passed he told his step-daughter she was almost as beautiful as her mother; and indeed Julie in her short fur coat, which was round and blonde, and in her blonde round hat deserved the compliment; she was like a yellow rose.

He accompanied them to the car. He had no sooner returned to his apartment than a card was brought to him. It was presented by a page, for Mr. Guelpa had discouraged the American habit of shouting names up through the telephone.

"Please bring Professor Ledsky here," he said.

Professor Hugo Ledsky was a distinguished-looking man. His fame in the world seemed to bolster him up physically. Though he had never seen him in the body, Mr. Guelpa would have recognized him anywhere. He had seen in various books and scientific publications so many photographs of the great man—pictures taken in his laboratory, on the lecture platform, and in groups of fellow-scientists. Mr. Guelpa, who had a brain of his own, kept his highest reverence for brain in others, and he welcomed Professor Ledsky with grave enthusiasm.

So this was the author of that epoch-making book, *Experimental Heredity*! For Mr. Guelpa it

had opened a new world of knowledge. And this was the authority, who had first defined the "Psychic Parasites" in that startling lecture that had shaken the scientific world; he whose studies of the "transformations of living beings," had created a new frontier for experimental psychology; this lean urgent man, with black eyes gleaming under shaggy brows, was Ledsky.

Mr. Guelpa had educated his perceptive faculties—all of them. And he trusted them. His sensitiveness to impressions was very keen. What first came to him, when he encountered a stranger, was a general impression, as though he had sensed that composite vibration which makes up the man and is as individual as the lines in the hand or the pores of a finger-tip. And even before his eyes, behind their glasses, had given their report of the stranger, his sensitive ears had recorded their impression of the man's walk, the rhythm of his steps, and, if he spoke, the revealing timbre of his voice—the things that can not normally lie.

So Mr. Guelpa, as was his wont, flashed a look at the tall man in front of him, clearly outlined in the doorway. It was a look of welcome and admiration, but it took in the entire man, and stamped on his unfailing memory a picture ineffaceable and exact.

Their hands met, with mutual respect; brain acknowledged brain; celebrity greeted celebrity; science confronted science.

"It was really for this I came to your country," Mr. Guelpa began, "to know the gentleman who wrote your books."

"You are very kind," Professor Ledsky returned; he had recovered his right hand from Mr. Guelpa's clasp and was rubbing it gently with the other, "it is a great pleasure to meet you. You need not have sent me that letter of introduction from Lacassagne. Your name had sufficed."

Mr. Guelpa was not a bitter foe to flattery. He warmed to the great scientist.

"It is strange about that letter," he remarked. "Poor Lacassagne died shortly after he sent it to me. He admired your work."

"Lacassagne was a great man in his day. He created the science of criminal anthropology, which you," and Professor Ledsky bowed, "are perfecting."

"Helping it on a little, perhaps," was Mr. Guelpa's modest answer.

He liked that tense vibrating voice; it rang true—as steel rings on steel. And the man himself might have been framed on steel springs, fine-tempered, restlessly alive. His body was slim and straight, very tall. The hand Mr. Guelpa had held for an instant in his own, was long and cool, smooth of skin, with not much grip in it. What was most striking was the head, high-domed, covered with thick, brown disorderly hair. The narrow sallow face was cleanly shaved. In comparison with that

huge forehead it seemed too small, with its thin nose and pointed chin; but it was a mobile face, fine-drawn and keen.

They were seated now, and Professor Ledsky leaned forward out of the old-fashioned chair, his restless hands always playing with each other.

"There are many things I must ask you, Mr. Guelpa, about your work, about the new men in your branch of science—I have been corresponding with Oloriz of Madrid, and Bayle. He is still in Paris, Bayle?"

He talked rapidly, but when he asked a question he always paused, waiting politely for a reply.

"Your laboratory work," he explained, "touches ours—that is why I am interested in your experiments. All sciences are one."

"Anyway they touch elbows."

"They flow into each other—criminology, biology, psychology, all the sciences, physical or mental, flow into each other." Mr. Guelpa assented although the theory did not seem worth getting excited about; but then, he reflected, Professor Ledsky was that sort of a man. Thought excited him. Especially his own thoughts.

"Yes, all one. It doesn't matter where you start you have to make the circuit of all human knowledge," the professor spoke urgently, as though he were trying to convince an audience, or perhaps merely impress the quiet little man in front of him. "We begin with a drop of mammalian blood and for

you it is the point of departure for a crime. For me it is the man himself—the whole man; his processes, his diseases, his ancestors are all in that drop of blood. An ancestor, sending down the heredity of madness or lust. A parasite of disease. So you have the crime and I have the man. We went by different paths to meet again. And so the sciences are coming together and, soon, they will be one. Then—a terrible thing will happen—”

Professor Ledsky's eyes burned in the hollows under his shaggy brows and his hands clenched; after a pause he added:

“Man will know nature, yes, but the terrible thing is he will know man! Science will lay him open, hunting out his subconscious thoughts, running down his dreams—all lying open! Why not? We shall know everything. The secrets of nature and the secrets of man. And then—”

“And then,” quietly interposed Mr. Guelpa, “life will be very dull, will it not? If there is nothing more to find out we shall lose our jobs.”

Professor Ledsky got off his high-horse. He laughed and ruffled his thick hair.

“My hobby,” he explained, “but I don't often talk about it.”

“I am glad you did. It is a mark of confidence,” Mr. Guelpa replied; he could understand that there were few to whom the great scientist could let himself go like that; and, after all, science makes cronies of men. Talk was easy now. Hav-

ing blown off his nervous enthusiasm Professor Ledsky showed his courteous interest not only in Mr. Guelpa but in his achievements. How long would he remain in New York? Whom had he already met? They must see more of each other. In a social way, too, he hoped. Their wives must meet. Why not a visit? Professor Ledsky had opened his country house up the Hudson for the winter holidays. Yes, the Guelpas must visit him. If the ghost of old Lacassagne who had brought them together were still prowling, ha! that would please him. A visit then—a long week-end. A world of snow up there. An old stone house on a hill and a wood fire roaring up the chimney. Yes, and he had a wonderful laboratory out there and they could experiment as well as talk.

"I need a change," Professor Ledsky said, "a rest from lectures, consultations, patients. You will come? That is promised. Though of course I shall have to consult my wife before setting the exact time."

Mr. Guelpa accepted Professor Ledsky's cordial invitation with becoming thanks. "You are really very kind," he said.

"My car will run you up."

"I am sure my wife and my step-daughter—"

"We shall make them happy," interrupted Professor Ledsky. "And now your own new book, Mr. Guelpa?"

"My little study on graphometry? Ah, it was

you Americans who opened the way. Persifer Frazer, Osborn, eh? But perhaps I shall add something," Mr. Guelpa remarked modestly—not that he disesteemed his work, but it was not his hour for crowing, "perhaps I can add a little to what they have done. You are interested? Oh, not in the detail, I know, but the subject would fit into your theory of the unity of the sciences. Matter is fluidic, changing, shifting, dancing about from one state to another. But the man! He remains himself. Three months before his birth he has on hands and feet the lines he will die with, unchanged. And his gestures never alter. The first step a child takes prefigures the walk of the man. And writing?"

The little man chuckled with self-approval.

"Writing is a gesture. And this gesture is conditioned in its extent, its direction, its force, by factors that remain from birth to death. Eh? Physical and anatomic factors. You know all that. Bone, muscle-leverage, nerve-transmission, always the same for that boy who grows to be a man. And what I prove is that the gesture of writing, for any given person, does not change; it is constant, always to be distinguished from a similar gesture made by any one else. Forgery, false writing—they can not be hid. This bit of science will help to lay the man open, eh, as you said?"

"That is very interesting," Professor Ledsky remarked thoughtfully, "it will take you far."

"You see? And I have many examples. 'A'

great deal of data. And already since my arrival comes a new case. Two writings, apparently as unlike each other as the baby's first step and the man's walk. But the two gestures were made by the same hand."

Professor Ledsky showed polite interest.

"I should like to see that," he remarked.

"I shall have photographs. I will show you the grammatic parallels that prove it. And it is an extremely interesting case. You know Mr. Faynis, the lawyer?"

"By repute."

"He put it before me. It is a big insurance swindle—I do not care about that part of it. But the handwriting, ah! that does interest me. And I want to see the woman."

"Then it is a woman who has swindled them?" Professor Ledsky was always politely attentive.

"It is her handwriting I have to go on, but, of course, I know nothing about the swindle. She is what attracts me—that gesture of hers. So different and yet the same. It was that gesture that got the money from an insurance in Los Angeles five years ago. Now with the same gesture she claims fifty thousand from the Great Orient. *She did not know the gesture was the same! But I know.*"

"Remarkable!"

"Yes, and I must see that woman. The case is just beginning, but Mr. Faynis has arranged for me to meet her. She is young, they say. A lady. Not

at all the accepted criminal type—but you and I know what rubbish that type theory is! Of course her appearance—her personality—means something. But it is her psychology—"

"Yes!" his visitor exclaimed abruptly, "that is what you would want. The psychology of the woman. And the handwriting—the gesture. Remarkable! This will help your book."

"It may be a very famous case," Mr. Guelpa suggested.

"Quite true! The better for your book." With this, Professor Ledsky got up suddenly; it was as though his steel-spring nerves had jerked him out of the chair.

"I am delighted! This has been a visit I shall not forget. Perhaps I have made a new friend? Yes. You will present my compliments to your family? A great pleasure."

Once more science shook hands with science, and Professor Ledsky, swift and urgent, went his way. Mr. Guelpa remained standing near the door, a whimsical expression, half admiration, half wonderment, on his face. His unspoken comment was: "A great man, that; but he is over-worked; he has too much brain to be quiet with." After a pause he added: "And he ought to get his hair cut. He is carrying too much weight."

He had no more than rolled a cigarette and lighted it, when John Faynis came in.

"I'm on my way up-town," Faynis said, after

the howdy-dos were disposed of, "and I dropped off to bring you a bit of news."

"Now what would that be? Sit down and smoke. Perhaps you have heard from the man who went out to the town where Mrs. Benton was born."

"You've guessed it, Mr. Guelpa."

"Was it a guess? I never guess. And you have learned that the story she told of her life was not quite true, eh?"

"True? It is a tissue of lies from start to finish. Not a word of truth. Birth and parents and the dear old aunt and the little fortune—all a lie."

"*Tiens, tiens!*" Mr. Guelpa exclaimed, indulging in his favorite expression which means nothing and means, at times so much, "all false? But no human story—nothing a human being relates—is ever wholly false, or wholly true. Behind every lie the truth always lurks in waiting. A life is like a coin—the truth is on the other side, the unseen side of it. A false statement like the one you have discovered is—it can not help being—an index of what she wanted to hide.

"Eh? but that can wait, Mr. Faynis, but Mrs. Benton—"

"Why did she take such a risk? Any fool would have known we could run that lie to earth."

"But would you have done so, if you had not had a good reason for suspicion? No, it would have passed well enough. And Mr. Benton? You know all about him?"

"His references seemed all right. So was the physician's report—a very healthy young man. Good for a long life, bar accident."

"Accidents will happen," Mr. Guelpa interposed, "especially in a business like that of the Great Orient. And when may I see Mrs. Benton?"

"Whenever you think best. She is at her home. Indeed we are having the house watched. Steeger advised it."

"Merely a precaution? Surely she can not suspect that you think there is anything wrong? That you have begun this investigation?"

"No, that's impossible. We have kept everything very quiet. She is merely waiting until her claim has passed through the ordinary routine. We are going to have Mr. Ringgold call on her, ostensibly about the policy, and all that, there are a few things we require to know. You might go with him. Your opinion of that woman—"

"Ah, the woman! Why will women do such things?" Mr. Guelpa asked drearily. "But they do. And she will find it does not pay. In fact Mr. Faynis murder rarely does pay."

"Murder!" Faynis cried.

"*Tiens!* You seem surprised! What did you think it was? She had to have a corpse. Of course Benton had to be the corpse. That is why he was murdered. Logical, is it not? Poison, I presume. Mr. Faynis, your people had better have that dead body exhumed."

Faynis had been staring at the little man who sat there smiling, nodding, talking of this horror in a quiet easy voice, colorless as ether. At last he slapped his hand down on his knee.

"That body was burned," he exclaimed.

"Ah, the dead man was cremated! And there is no way of making him speak," Mr. Guelpa's face was lit with satisfaction. "Burned and the ashes, of course, scattered to the wind or water. Splendid! The evidence is literally pouring in—pouring in—"

"Evidence! But we've lost the one thing that could have proved that murder was done," Faynis interjected.

"No, no," and Mr. Guelpa repeated the words as though he loved them, "it is just beginning to pour in—pour in—"

CHAPTER VI

THE RECORD IN THE DUST

“AND at first you were not quite sure, Mr. Ringgold?”

“Not sure at all. It was an impression. And then gradually I remembered, Mr. Guelpa, and had no doubt at all. Certainly I had seen her before.”

They were walking side by side toward the street of the Narrow House in affable talk. Mr. Guelpa, exercising the charm that was his when he wanted to use it, had won Mr. Ringgold's confidence and a little of his admiration. There was a thin streak of romance in the methodic man of business and it vibrated to Mr. Guelpa's expert massage.

“And was this Mrs. Benton dressed like the woman you saw in Los Angeles? Did that help?”

“Well, of course she was in black, but it was the veil drawn over the face—when she raised it—yes, that brought it back. And she was pale.”

“Both of them? But that means nothing because it may mean anything. It may mean fear, or guilt, or weariness—anything. She was dressed quite in the mode?”

“Mrs. Benton? Well when she came to the

Great Orient she was dressed like any one else in similar circumstances. I particularly remember the veil, and her fur pulled up round her throat and the close black dress."

"Did she sit down?"

"Of course, Mr. Guelpa."

"And she sat erect? Both feet on the floor?"

Mr. Ringgold emitted a short whinny of laughter.

"I was looking at her face," he replied.

"And that was calm?"

"Calm and steady and—pale."

"I will tell you something, Mr. Ringgold. An anecdote. Once I was studying a lady. It was in Paris. She was, I was sure, a murder-lady, but there was only suspicion to go on. And, as the way is with us, she had been confronted with the corpse. At first she showed the natural emotion of a woman brought suddenly in front of a dead body—quite horrible, just as it had fallen. Then she sat there, calm, mistress of herself. Her denials were natural; they had all the steadiness of innocence. So I did not study her face. I looked at her foot. She had crossed one leg over the other and at each beat of the heart, the foot she had raised moved. Not regularly. And merely by watching the foot I could read the wild variations of her pulse, as though I had had my finger on her wrist. Those little movements of the foot, showed that her pulse was throbbing and jerking with terror, horror, fierce emo-

tion. Her face? It was placid, self-controlled; it told nothing. Ah, Mr. Ringgold, when you would study a woman do not try to read her face or her eyes. No man can read them aright. Make her cross her legs and you can read her secret in the rise and fall of her balanced foot. It is the one part of her body she can not train to lie for her."

Mr. Ringgold had a momentary vision of a room full of women, sitting with crossed legs; and while their faces shone with innocent gaiety their pulsating feet confessed monstrous crimes; it was most disturbing. He eyed the little man askance. Mr. Guelpa smiled; he was probing George Ringgold for that thin streak of imagination which somewhere in his orderly humdrum nature, he knew, lay hid; it was a meditative smile.

"And the house of Mrs. Benton?"

"This is it," Mr. Ringgold said.

They were in front of the Narrow House—the house of death and mystery—and the iron-railed steps leading up to the door. For a while no one answered their ring, and they rang the bell again. Then the door opened and Nakki's bland face appeared.

"Well?" he asked, conjuring up a look of interest.

"To see Mrs. Benton," Ringgold said, his voice all business and a business card in his hand.

Nakki shook his head to and fro.

"No," he murmured sympathetically, "it is too bad. Mrs. Benton is not at home."

"She will see me," persisted Mr. Ringgold; "that order was not for me."

"Well, I have made an explanation," Nakki continued pleasantly; "Mrs. Benton has gone away. Good-by."

He started to close the door, but Mr. Guelpa was leaning against it and it did not move.

"One moment? When will she return?" Mr. Guelpa asked; and Nakki opened wider the door to look at him.

He saw a mysterious little man in a fur coat and a round hat, saw, too, above the brilliant necktie, a grim face and the coldest eyes he had ever confronted. His mood dropped to defensive sulkiness.

"I do not know," he declared. "Everybody gone. Mr. Benton, well, he is dead. Mrs. Benton she has gone away."

"When will she return?" Ringgold inquired.

"I do not know." It was all he had to say; the night before he had called a taxi and she had driven away; and Nakki tried to close the door.

"Careful, boy!" Mr. Guelpa snapped out.

He understood the Oriental mind and he knew the Oriental mind dipped its flag, always, to authority; but only when that authority was mysterious, alien, unfamiliar.

"The insurance," he whispered, lowering his voice; "come on, Mr. Ringgold. We shall see the house. Here, boy, take that card from Mr. Ringgold and keep it carefully."

Nakki took it as though it were a talisman; he was still studying it when they brushed past him.

"Is this the reception-room?"

It was the parlor and Mr. Guelpa glanced around it curiously. It was a room at once rich and awdry, and over the gaudy furniture lay a film of dust. Mr. Guelpa stood in the doorway. His inspection was slow and unhurried. The shade was half drawn and near the window was an easy chair, book lying upon it.

"My book," Nakki volunteered the remark, "I am a student. Also housekeeper."

"Go back to your book, then," Mr. Guelpa said; "if we need you we shall let you know."

Nakki went without hesitation. His yellow face showed neither curiosity nor concern. He picked up the book and sat down, blandly indifferent to the goings of that mysterious white authority.

Mr. Guelpa walked the length of the hall and glanced down the stairs leading to the basement, before he returned to Mr. Ringgold, who was waiting near the door.

"We shall go up-stairs first," he said, "to the sleeping-rooms."

The front bedroom was where the man had died. It was in order, save for the bed, stripped naked of linen. Along one wall was a divan where a watcher might have lain to be within call of the patient. There were chairs, a night-table, a chiffonier, a large rug—nothing else.

The room had been cleansed, disinfected, deodorized—the ghost of the dead and the imprints of the living had been blown out of it.

Mr. Guelpa went to the window and drew aside the silk curtain. The street was peopled with passers-by.

“You know that your company is having this house watched?” he inquired of Mr. Ringgold.

“Yes, I know.”

“But do you happen to know the men who have been put on to watch the house?”

“No,” Mr. Ringgold answered, “that would be out of my department.”

“H’m, then you couldn’t pick them out in that crowd. Of course not. And they seem to have let her slip through their fingers,” Mr. Guelpa observed; he showed no particular concern; and his interest in the room seemed to be slight.

He went to Mrs. Benton’s room. It was a large bedroom at the back, the only entrance to it being from the hall. It faced south and through the two windows light streamed in cheerily. Here, too, tawdriness and gaudiness were jumbled together, but there was comfort in the easy chairs, the ample bed and the *chaise-longue*. And there were, too, the things a woman wants, mirrors, a dressing-table, frank concessions to the feminine.

It was essentially a woman’s room but wrecked with disorder. A silken eider-down was pulled up over the humped bed. Garments lay here and there

as though they had been tossed by a heedless hand. Towels trailed in the adjoining bathroom. The door of the big closet opened on cast-off slippers, shoes, tumbled gowns. It was as though the former occupant had swept out of the room, tornado-wise, leaving behind a tumult of disorder. Haste! Flight!

But in that hurried departure so much had been left behind—not only the garments that clung round the woman's body had been left and not alone the bed that had drunk in her sleep. She had left more than that in her flight. A shadowy part of herself remained. Impalpable, but real.

It was Mr. Guelpa's theory that the person who occupies a room imprints upon it a shadowy self, and records there not only the physical habitudes, but the habits of thought and emotions. The vibration of those multiple groups of cells that made up the woman who had lived in this room were still pulsating in the ether—still persisting. And Mr. Guelpa knew that the sunlight streaming in had printed upon the walls thronging photographs of Mrs. Benton; they were there; they were too faint to make an impression on the retina of the eye; but sooner or later the camera would be able to capture them—so fast science advances.

Faint and vague. And yet to Mr. Guelpa's highly trained faculties of perception a ghost of the living woman was still in the room. He could perceive it moving slowly, languidly, to and fro, or

lying there in the *chaise-longue* infinitely quiet, the book fallen from the lazy hand, as she stared, perhaps, at her reflection in the tall mirror on the opposite wall. That was the way he seemed to visualize her. Intuition? Imagination? He would have said that his alert senses, disciplined for many years, had captured the impression and presented it to him complete. Scores of tiny impressions, caught by the senses, revealed her—recreated her. She had left behind her the almost imperceptible human odor that only a hound could pick up. Her habitual movements were recorded everywhere—that long chair with the lazy pillows and the fallen book and the mirror. The reading-lamp over the bed was also confirmatory. Mr. Guelpa could see her stretched out there, reading or staring into that other mirror over the dressing-table; a third one hung above the mantelpiece. A dainty lady. A quiet room, its message one of safe repose.

What wild storm of terror had swept through it? What tumult of haste had torn her out of its quietude? Leaving behind them a chaos of disorder.

Mr. Guelpa did not touch the scattered garments. At first he touched nothing, merely standing, his little hat in his hand—after all, it was a lady's room—erect, every sense seemingly alert.

He turned to the motionless Mr. Ringgold, who, waiting in the doorway, had respected his long silence.

"You had no reason to believe she suspected that an investigation had been set on foot?" Mr. Guelpa inquired.

"Only that she must have recognized me in spite of her denial."

"But why did she go on with it all these days? Send back the papers duly attested? Persist in her claim?"

Mr. Guelpa was questioning himself, rather than the insurance man. "It gave her time to prepare for her flight, of course, but then, since she had time, why this disorder, denoting panic? More than panic. Did she take any luggage away with her? Seemingly not, from what the Japanese boy had said. Then this hurried search of the garments and the room had been made in order to make sure that no clue was left behind."

Smiling approval of himself, Mr. Guelpa went lightly across the floor to the lounge-chair.

"But of course she left many things, eh? She is stamped all over the room. This book," he said, "for instance."

He picked it up carefully with a finger of each hand at top and bottom of the book; it was a volume of verse, quite new, but here and there a page was dog-eared. Three pages. And on each folded leaf, of course, a finger-print had been impressed.

"The obvious," he said lightly, "we do not need very much of that sort of thing. Hair? A woman always leaves hair about. Unfailingly. I really

think one could trace a woman around the world by what comes off her head. And one little hair! She does not know that every hair of her head is numbered—like a convict—for purposes of identification, eh?"

In the overturned scrap-basket, near the dressing-table, were no papers or scraps of papers, but clinging to the bottom of it were combings of a woman's hair—a twisted bunch of glossy dark brown hair. And with this brown hair were other hairs of a pale sand-color. It was mystifying. And then Mr. Guelpa remembered that there had been two women in that house—Mrs. Benton and Nurse McCune. There was more of the sand-colored hair in the brush, tangled there. It was long and strong; a faded odor of perfume could be discerned.

"A delicate lady you told me, Mr. Ringgold, rather fine? I wonder whether you are a good judge. The hair is rather robust. Would it be that of the nurse?"

"No, that is Mrs. Benton's hair," returned Mr. Ringgold, looking at it closely, "I remember the color perfectly."

"Odd," retorted Mr. Guelpa, "but her fingers will tell. The lady who lived in this room is beginning to recreate herself for me. Hand, hair—and foot?"

He stooped and picked up one of the shoes scattered about. It was quite new and had not yet acquired the shape of the foot; nor had the other

shoes and slippers. The knitted bed-slippers were shapeless.

"So far as we are concerned," observed Mr. Guelpa, "the lady is footless. Unless—"

What he sorted out of the cast-off garments was a rumpled silk stocking; it was black. He laid it on the table near the book and the bunches of hair.

"Mr. Guelpa—"

George Ringgold at last found voice. He had been watching in his short-sighted way the little man, as he ferreted about; but his hearing was better than his sight.

"That clock's still going," he remarked knowingly.

"Thank you," said Mr. Guelpa, "it is on the hour."

He glanced at the little gilt clock, ticking away on the mantelpiece. It had the old wooden mantelpiece to itself. And it was a very ordinary clock, but Mr. Guelpa walked toward it, slowly, whispering his eternal "*Tiens, tiens!*"

A little man, his head was still higher than the mantel-shelf. That was old, discolored, abraded by the wear of years, rough, too, with neglect. Head sidewise Mr. Guelpa swept the surface with his intent beady eyes. Then again his "*Tiens, tiens!*"

"Dust," he remarked, "old dust. And dust, Mr. Ringgold, is the débris of matter. Now when matter touches matter it leaves its mark, indelible. And you see there are marks in the dust, eh?"

Mr. Ringgold peered at the wooden shelf.

"But marks of what?" Mr. Guelpa continued, expanding into the talkativeness that took him now and then, for he found it hard always to bottle up that wide general knowledge of his. "You see, the dust has settled there day after day—layer upon layer. So the marks vary in distinctness, but they all are imprints of the same thing. And that, my dear Mr. Ringgold, is cloth. Cloth! The chemist can tell you of what that sifting New York dust is composed, but I! I can tell you what marked it. They dug up in Pompeii a slab of dead lava and on it were the marks of the toga of some one who perished when the city was overwhelmed—the weave of the linen, its web and woof, had remained there for thousands of years. You could have identified that toga for no two pieces of woven cloth are absolutely the same—always there are tiny irregularities individual as the hair on your head. Each thread is numbered. Under the microscope its real individuality comes out. Now this is a heavy weave, you see. Not silk, not cotton, not linen. It is wool.

"*Tiens!*" and Mr. Guelpa stood back from his inspection of the mantelpiece and faced the insurance man, who was in over his depth.

"Shall I tell you? The man who came here, again and again, leaning always his elbow there on the mantelpiece. You may want to know him. Shall I describe him? Perhaps I may be wrong,

for you never know the immense number of people who are just the opposite of what they seem to be. But this man? Medium height. You see how his arm lay. And not thin, a well-fed man, both flesh and bone were behind that imprint. He drooped there one elbow on the mantelpiece, moving very little. There is your man, dressed in a rather old gray coat, a shabby man—either from lack of means or carelessness. Calm and slow. He makes no impatient movements. Do you see him?"

Mr. Ringgold shook a perplexed head.

"No? Not even the tweed coat? But there he stood, drooping there, nearly always in the same place, because so he faced the woman who lay on the lounge-chair. Ah!"

Mr. Guelpa chuckled his triumph.

"I do not understand—"

"No? The mark of a coat sleeve in the dust. A tweed coat, worn threadbare at the elbow. And the color? I got it from that tiny tuft of cloth caught in yonder splintered edge of the wooden shelf! And this slumbrous man who wore it would not be Mr. Benton? He was a big red man, you told me, an athlete. A man who stood up. But I should like to see his clothes. His bedroom unfortunately has been cleaned out—stripped. But here, in this closet there might be something." And Mr. Guelpa stuck his head in the closet, looked about and went gingerly in. Deftly, one after the other, he picked up the gowns—

"What the devil are you doing here!" a big voice crashed. And the door of the bedroom was thrown open. Mr. Ringgold turned with a start to face a bearded man in a huge coat, "and who the devil is that?"

The big man jerked his head toward the placid Mr. Guelpa, who emerged from the closet, a black gown trailing from his hand, a benign smile on his face, his eye-glasses cocked inquiringly.

"And where is my patient?"

"Ah, of course, it is Doctor Hamilton! Permit me, Doctor, we are from the insurance company," Mr. Guelpa said.

"So Nakki told me. He showed me your card. And now where is Mrs. Benton?"

"That is Mr. Ringgold whose card you saw. I? Never mind. We called to see Mrs. Benton, and—"

"Did you expect to find her in the clothes-closet?" Doctor Hamilton inquired grimly.

"No, Doctor, no," replied Mr. Guelpa softly, "and I regret to say she is not there. I wish I knew where she was because I particularly wish to see her. Perhaps you can tell us?"

"I left her in that bed yesterday. She was ill, very ill. She should be there now. Damn it, what has been going on here?" the doctor suddenly demanded.

"Your patient, Doctor, has mysteriously disappeared. She went away last night. Did not Nakki tell you?"

"He did not. He sent me up here. And so Mrs. Benton went away last night! Why?"

"That is what I intend to find out," Mr. Guelpa answered a trifle sharply, for he did not like a heckling tone, "and I hope you will help me. I am Mr. Guelpa."

Doctor Hamilton bowed; he was quiet enough now; he lowered his voice to a decent level of respect: "Of course I have heard of you. We have to keep in touch with your work although it is not in my line. And I knew you were in New York, but what the deuce—if you don't mind—are you doing in this thing? The Great Orient must be mighty keen on trying to get out of paying their just dues if they've dragged you into it."

"That is a queer compliment, Doctor. Will you sit down?"

Mr. Guelpa laid aside the black gown and took chair himself.

"I will tell you what I am doing in this house—and in that clothes-closet! Well? It is merely this. Naturally, before paying the claim, the Great Orient looked into the case. There was Mrs. Benton, yes. But her antecedents."

"Might find a way out of paying! Well, my policy is in the Great Orient, but I can take it out—"

"Perhaps. Mr. Ringgold can tell you. But, Doctor Hamilton, you will permit me a question? You have known Mrs. Benton some time?"

"I'll answer that. Thank God, I have. I've known her in a way—ever since they took this house."

"And she has talked to you of her earlier life?"

"Why shouldn't she? At least I know about her earlier life. She talked to Nurse McCune and I have it from her."

"Ah, so you know! Her birthplace in Ohio. The father and mother who died. The kind aunt who took care of her. The little fortune."

"Well, what of it?"

"Perhaps, Doctor Hamilton, it will surprise you to hear that every word of that story—every word," Mr. Guelpa shot the statement at him, "is a lie!"

"A lie!"

"False from beginning to end. A foolish invention. A lie. That is why I am here, since you wish to know, sir."

Doctor Hamilton's chivalry stirred in him; his thoughts of his patient—the gentle pale woman he had watched over—were more than kind; but he was broken to worldly wisdom and he did not lift his voice in her defense, save to say: "It may be a mistake."

"There is no mistake. Did she hear of that investigation? We kept it very still. Did something else frighten her? In any case, Doctor Hamilton, your patient has disappeared—into the night."

"Unquestionably you've frightened her. She is a weak, timid little woman. She was ill—the nurse

ad been called away to another case—alone, without friends—”

“Yes,” interrupted Mr. Guelpa, “but before this break, timid little woman disappeared, Doctor, a strong, big man died—and his body was burned up!”

Doctor Hamilton’s bull-like torso lumped back in his chair; he was trying to realize the meaning under those appalling words; he did not have time to speak, for Mr. Guelpa was leaning toward him, one hand outstretched, whispering harshly: “What did he die of, Doctor, what did he die of, eh?”

“You have seen the certificate I signed?” was the reply, “that’s it.”

“His heart, eh? That is the universal cause of death. But what caused it to stop so suddenly?”

“Frankly,” Doctor Hamilton exclaimed, suddenly interested, “I wish to the devil I knew. I hadn’t seen anything seriously wrong with his heart—not especially—when all at once it went back on us. Of course that happens. But I wish I knew. Indeed I wanted an autopsy, but it was merely to satisfy my own professional curiosity and I could not insist. There was Mrs. Benton to consider, you know, and—”

“She did not want it. I see. And you did not insist. Quite so, Doctor. And one thing more. You do not mind? It is about the cremation of the corpse. It was Mrs. Benton who desired the body should be burned? Of course.”

"On the contrary it was Benton, himself, who wished it. I never heard Mrs. Benton speak of it. She was quite overcome by his death. She left everything to Nurse McCune and me. Even before his illness took a serious turn Benton spoke of it—often. He had theories about being buried alive. You know the kind of person who thinks we doctors are such fools we do not know even how to make sure a man is dead. The cremation was Benton's own idea. His request."

"Did Mrs. Benton hear him talk of it?"

"She may have. She was almost always with him—loyal to the end, I wish to tell you. And your damnable theory that she killed her husband, for I see what you are driving at, is an outrage to humanity," Doctor Hamilton protested in his old fiery way.

"Perhaps? And her disappearance? The trumped-up story of her early life! What do you make of all that, Doctor?"

The big doctor heaved himself impatiently out of his chair:

"What should I know about that," he retorted curtly, and with a "Good day to you," strode indignantly out of the room. The street door had barely closed behind him when Nakki, the Japanese boy, entered and approached Mr. Ringgold, holding out a card.

"Your card?" he inquired blandly.

"Yes."

"Then the gentleman down-stairs, outside the door, wishes to be admitted, and to speak to you, if you please."

"Who is he?"

Nakki's face announced his ignorance.

"I would suggest you have him brought up into Mr. Benton's room," Mr. Guelpa put in, "I want this room locked and sealed so I may get the impressions I desire to make—and I will do it myself, but now I shall go with you. An unknown man always interests me. He may be any one."

In the naked room where Richard Benton had died, Nakki brought to them a commonplace-looking man, who held in one hand a lighted cigar. He removed his hat and nodded.

"Mr. Ringgold? Yes, I've seen you. They sent me up here from the office. They wanted you to know. Is he all right?" he wagged his head toward Mr. Guelpa.

"Certainly. This is Mr. Guelpa. Say what you have to say."

"I'm Grogan from the Agency. Your woman is missing? Beat it. Got away?"

"Yes, she has disappeared. Were you watching this house?"

"Me and my partner, Tim Lear. She got away all right. Last night it was. Well, so did I and so did Tim Lear. It was a long chase and we nearly lost her more than once. Taxi, street-car, then taxi, trolley-car and then an automobile that was

waiting for her—but that won't interest you. 'Anyway we ran her down. An' Tim is camped on her. 'And I'm sending up more men. She'll stay where she is till you want her. Like to know where she is?' And Grogan grinned at the two men in front of him.

Mr. Guelpa showed no particular interest in the query. Ringgold waited expectantly.

"Up the Hudson. Westchester County—nice little country place. That's where she's camped this minute. She made it last night."

"You know the house?"

"Sure, it belongs to one of our big guns. He's some expert, I tell you. One of these insanity experts. We've had him in many a case and the woman is tucked away in his house."

"In whose house?" demanded Ringgold.

"Professor Ledsky's."

"Ledsky!"

This exclamation came from the agitated Mr. Ringgold. "Ledsky!"

"One of his dizzy patients, perhaps!"

The insurance man turned to Mr. Guelpa.

"What do you think, sir?"

Mr. Guelpa smiled and said—nothing at all.

CHAPTER VII

THE GIRL WHO SAID NO

AS DOCTOR HAMILTON went down the steps of the Narrow House into the street two thoughts were busy in his mind—the woman he had held fainting in his arms during the ride back from that burial (in fire and oblivion) of Richard Benson's body; the other nagging thought was of the death certificate he had signed; damn it, were they going to make trouble about that? Thinking of the certificate his mind was in a cursing mood; it had been a sound certificate—heart failure—that's the way these big athletes, when they take to drink and laziness, generally crumple up! No doubt of that. The man died of heart failure as every one knows; and in his case the cause of it, as he had stated, was angina. Acute angina striking at him of a sudden. The symptoms all confirmed his diagnosis.

And now these men talked of foul play. Good God! To what lengths wouldn't that insurance company go to save their dirty dollars? It would be a pleasant thing, for him, to be pilloried on the witness-stand and torn apart by a lot of hireling

experts and savage lawyers. There would not be much of his reputation left, when they were done with him. And damn that little Guelpa and his malicious curiosity. How dared the fellow shake a finger at him, with his infernal "What did he die of, eh?" Gloomily Doctor Hamilton told himself he wished to the deuce he had insisted on an autopsy.

But there was the little woman!

Surely there was no real reason for his going against her. And heaven knows life was hard enough on her and all other women. Now, as he walked heavily toward his office, Doctor Hamilton put aside his own predicament and his thoughts ran, undivided, toward Mrs. Benton. A quiet pretty little thing; gentle and oblivious of herself—just brooding over that brute of a husband with a kind of loyal watchfulness. By jove! she hardly slept during those last weeks. Unselfish, dutiful and in spite of her loss of sleep, her sense of duty held her up. She was always there, ready to help, controlling herself, keeping a sort of pathetic calm—steadiness—

A brave little woman, Doctor Hamilton reflected, poor little thing. No wonder she had disappeared, now these wolves of greed and suspicion were yelping after her. She had stood about all she could; and she had a perfect right to go off for a rest. He was sorry Nurse McCune was not with her. She had been called to another case.

Mrs. Benton needed friends now—needed not only Mrs. McCune, that invaluable person, but as well, Doctor Hamilton himself. Surely Mrs. Benton would let him know.

His offices and bachelor home were on the first floor of an apartment-house in Tenth Street. He let himself in and went to the table in the reception-room which faced the street. The attendant had left on his desk the memoranda for the day and his telephone calls. They were numerous enough but none of them pressed. Doctor Hamilton was one of those faithful family physicians whose round of life lay amid friends of long standing. In the dozen years or so of his practise he had seen the children grow up—dragged through infantile maladies—had welcomed scores of babies and soothed many a death-bed at which old age or illness struck. His rather boisterous manner covered but did not conceal his fiery zeal for his profession and the tenderness within him. His life had been without upsets and without tragedy—save for his daily battle against death.

And now tragic things were tugging at him: that investigation into Benton's death and the certificate he had granted: and then that terrified woman who had clutched at him, in her panic fear, and collapsed in his arms.

That little woman!

Why that sudden terror?

And why had she fled? Guilty? One might as

well accuse a white lily of murder. Well, he would do all he possibly could for her.

He had been pacing the room to and fro, and halted now at the window, looking out into the street. A girl was standing there gazing up at the sign which announced his name and profession. When she caught his eye she nodded and smiled and then rang his bell. He opened the door himself and stepped aside to permit her to enter the reception-room.

"You are a doctor, ain't you? Then I guess you'll do," she said, and laughed as though they were old friends glad to see each other. Her laugh ran part way up the scale and then down again; it was charming—and her own. She had round legs and carmine lips and brown smudgy eyes. Moreover her face was nicely painted. A round red hat was crowded down over her ears. She wore a long mouse-colored coat, with fur cuffs and collar. When she threw it open the world saw, with pleasure, lengthy, nude stockings, plumply filled, and low black shoes with buckles. She gave the impression that it was sheer pride that kept her from chewing gum. She threw herself into an easy chair.

Doctor Hamilton was not interested.

This was not the sort of patient who usually entered his reception-room.

"Gee! I'm all in, Doc," she said, "I'll say it! And at that I don't see where I get off."

"If you would kindly explain—"

"I'm taking a long shot but I thought you might know," the young woman went on with easy familiarity. "I'm Miss Glenn—Kittie, you know—and I'm looking for a friend."

"I'm afraid you have come to the wrong house." And Doctor Hamilton's professional urbanity left him.

"I get you," she replied calmly, "but you've got me wrong. The friend I'm looking for ain't you."

"Well, what then?"

"It's Pete. Mr. Barling."

Miss Glenn opened her red bag and took out a telegram.

"This is from Pete, asking me to come on at once," she explained, "for he says he is dangerously ill—very sick—and I beat it out of Hollywood at a moment's notice, six days ago. But find him? Say, they've got the address balled up. If it ain't the wrong street it's the wrong number and I've been asking up and down this block, until I saw your kind of a face in the window—and here I am. You're a doctor all right. If he's in bad like that he'd have a doctor. Why not you, since you live in the neighborhood. Do you know him? Pete. Mr. Peter Barling. He's a hard man not to see. Well?"

Miss Glenn was an unexpected and incoherent girl, but Doctor Hamilton understood what she wanted and unbent. Indeed, he thought if she had

a washed face and combed hair she would have appeared as a rather attractive girl, sincerely interested in this man who lay somewhere—at the wrong number or in the wrong street—dangerously ill; and whose appealing telegram had pulled her across the continent. Under her crude exterior, a staunch little heart must be beating.

“Let me see the telegram,” he said. “Perhaps I can help you, though I myself have no patient by that name.”

“He can’t be blinking out,” she exclaimed, with a sudden catch in her voice, “why, my Pete’s as strong as a bull. Some man! But he must be mighty sick or he wouldn’t have sent that S. O. S. He knows I ain’t a millionaire. But we’re going to be, both of us—it’s all we’ve been waiting for and he is just pulling off the *big thing*. Why, his letters have been full of it. And then comes this telegram,” she went on in her haphazard way. “Pete—all in and waiting for me. Wanting me. That’s my hunch! Hell’s bells!” suddenly cried Miss Glenn, bringing both feet down on the floor. There were real tears in her eyes and her lower lip trembled.

“Now wait a bit,” Doctor Hamilton leaned forward and patted her shoulder sympathetically, “it shouldn’t be difficult to get this unsnarled. Where have these letters you speak of been sent from? What address had you?”

“General Post-Office for the last year. You see

he was traveling about a good bit—always on the go, in fact, and so there was no regular address.”

“I see. But some of Mr. Barling’s friends, now, couldn’t they help you out? There’s nothing to cry about, is there?”

But she didn’t know his friends here in New York. Of course out in Los Angeles—but Pete had been gone from there for a long time—and you know how people mill round and fade out; and as for New York, well, she was some hick; anyway, Pete had been knocking about this year more than ever before—New Orleans—Cuba—any old where following the races. Perhaps he had pulled off a big thing like that. The telegram looked like it, didn’t it? And now he was lying up somewhere, all in—where?

The girl kept on pouring out her incoherent story, her mood shifting from gloom to anger; and as she talked Doctor Hamilton’s eyes kindled with expectant interest. Across her smoke-screen of words he began to see the figure of a man, a big man—“not as big as you”—but big, athletic, red, who had been following the races; Cuba—

And that same figure of a man he seemed to see lying dead in a bed in a Narrow House—

What did it mean?

A coincidence?

Doctor Hamilton was not a suspicious man by nature. He took life in a hale-fellow way, accepting it for what it appeared to be; but he had just

come from a house where busybodies were ferretting about, digging at a corpse, hunting a poor little woman, laying pits for her—perhaps for him—and what there was of suspicion in his frank mind woke sharply. Those ferrets might be going to prove that Richard Benton was this Pete the girl was describing so graphically. But why? What would that mean? At all events it might mean that Miss Glenn—with her smudgy eyes and Hollywood lips—was one of the ferrets, playing her part in this mystery of money and death. His quick suspicion killed his nascent sympathy. After all, the girl might be anything. And this telegram trick that had got her into his office?

He squared away from her, his hands thrust into his pockets.

“That’s the best I can do for you, Miss Glenn, and you are taking my time,” he added grimly. “I shall say good-by.”

The girl was on her feet in an instant. Her surprise was evident.

“So that’s your sort, is it!” she exclaimed angrily. “You do step high! Any charge for this? Because if there is it’s got to be under ninety cents. That’s about my pile.”

She laughed scornfully as she went out, swinging the mouse-colored coat and rapping her high-heeled shoes. From his window Doctor Hamilton watched her.

Miss Glenn’s anger had burned up the tears in

her eyes. Doctor Hamilton's abrupt dismissal had been so unexpected she was still very angry. At first he had seemed such a decent sort and then of a sudden he had got the wind up. Kittie muttered her opinion of him and walked rapidly on. Where she was going she did not know. She had exhausted every way she could imagine of finding the address where Peter Barling lay "all in." At the telegraph office she had learned nothing; and her experience with Doctor Hamilton had put off her plan of questioning the doctors of the neighborhood. It was a big town and a strange town. No palm-trees! And the men were up the ladder. No free and easy friendliness—just those damn grins that meant the other thing. A ten-dollar-a-day extra in Hollywood knows. She'd be a fool if she didn't know. And she knew all of them—the long-haired ones and the short ones who pulled the sentimental stuff.

Withal she was good, as good a girl as ever washed out her own handkerchiefs and blouses and dined, often, on hope or "hot-dogs." Of course there was Pete. It was simply impossible to love Pete and run off the trail. Her love for Pete had held her, even when he was away and she had to feed her devotion on scrappy letters and promises of the good time coming when Pete, at last, should have pulled off a good big thing. She was rather surprised herself at her loyalty, for it had not helped her in her tawdry way of life; but there she was—

her love for Pete had got into her blood and into her imagination. He used to pick her up and hold her at arm's length, while she lay balanced on the palms of his hands. Not love Pete? And he was dying, at that moment, it might be, within a few yards of her, "all in" and waiting for her and the comfort of her arms and her mouth.

She was wandering in the streets she had traversed before, ringing bells, inquiring— This was Ninth Street. She wandered on, gloomily.

Suddenly she paused.

A half block ahead of her she saw three men come down the steps of a house. One, who looked like everybody else, crossed the street and sauntered away. One of the other men raised his walking-stick and hailed a passing taxi. He was a queer dick, Miss Glenn thought, with his little round black hat and foreign face. She was near enough now to see him clearly as he stepped up daintily into the taxi-cab. Then she saw his companion, the third man—

She tried to scream, but emotion choked her voice. Her "Hey, George!" was a feeble yelp. She started on a run, but she was a few seconds too late. When she reached the spot where the cab had been, it had already picked up speed and was rocketing down the street. And then it turned the corner and was out of sight.

"Hell's bells!" cried Miss Glenn. "Of all the rotten luck! That was George Ringgold! Sure it

was George. Just the man who could help me, and, oh, wouldn't he!"

Miss Glenn stamped her foot in impotent fury. Then the tears came to her eyes. A little hick with ninety cents, alone in the fierce old town—hell's bells! It was putrid luck and no mistake. And good old George, who would have put everything right for her. Would have? She sure knew. And George knew and he wasn't one to forget. He had made out there, in the Golden West, the discovery that she was not like other girls. She was the Exception. And she had danced through the tame life of George Ringgold, through his prim orderly ambitions and business ways, like a little devil at once glittering and smudgy—

For she was the girl who had said no!

CHAPTER VIII

THE CROOKED TREE

“**Y**OU received my wife’s invitation?” Professor Ledsky inquired. “Of course. And we are both delighted that you can come to us over the week-end.”

“It will be a great pleasure,” Mr. Guelpa replied; there was real warmth in his voice. He often said that men fall apart into groups, drawn not so much by personal attraction, as by mental sympathies. Thus, as a rule, their friendships are based upon a common interest in sport, or business, law, or any other profession, trade or hobby. And nothing, he would say, pulls men closer together than scientific pursuit. No matter what science; for, when the sciences do not touch, they follow parallel lines with the vague hope of meeting at some far-off point. And so, if scientists do not always love one another, it is only because they have preferred joyous professional hatred, which is merely the reverse side of love and equally compelling. Just as jockeys and journalists, lawyers and doctors develop the group-tendency, so the scientific investigators are drawn toward each other. Indeed it was

this social law, quite as much as his devouring curiosity, which had hauled Mr. Guelpa over-sea to fraternize with Osborn and Ledsky, Persifer Frazer and the other pioneers in his own special kind of scientific research. And so his sympathy went out to this great man, whose fame had run round the world; and he watched him—as he dominated the hotel sitting-room—with kindly interest.

A lank nervous figure of a man, Professor Ledsky, as Mr. Guelpa had already perceived, gave an impression of swift-burning energy; it shone in his deep-set eyes—vibrated in his hands. A man at the peak of life—neither young nor old. Young rather than old. And yet Mr. Guelpa noticed in him those signs of age—the hollow temples and the veins in the hands.

“He is literally burning himself up,” the little Frenchman reflected; well, science is a hard task-master, and had left Mr. Guelpa himself merely a few wisps of dry hair on his bony scalp.

“We were talking of you the other day at the club,” Professor Ledsky said, “and you really must give us a lecture. Give us a shot at your new book, something of yours we haven’t all studied over—a few chapters from the new manual. Graphometry, isn’t it?”

“I am not quite sure,” Mr. Guelpa replied slowly. “In fact, I am busy just now. A problem.”

“A problem? Everything is that. Just being alive is a problem.”

"Yes, but mine is one of criminology. And it is interesting, but then—every crime is, eh? No matter how small a crime may be, behind it lies a jungle of speculation—motive and method, explanatory heredity, psychology, all the why and why and why! Even the beginning is hard, eh? Merely to discover the crime itself. Well, first find your crime. And then where are you?"

"Yes, then where are you," Professor Ledsky repeated, nodding approval of the vehement little man. Mr. Guelpa, who did not dislike hearing the sound of his own voice when an attentive listener gave ear to him, went on.

"Where are you? You have a crime and that is all. All the rest is to be done. You have to get at the circumstances—the little insignificant ones and the big ones that seem to be prominent as signposts, all the details, all the divergences. And it is not only finding these things. There is the harder task of not being led astray by probabilities. What we have most to beware of is the obvious."

"I don't quite see, Mr. Guelpa."

"But why should you not see? If you discover an unknown crime, lying quietly in the shade, what is the Obvious Solution doing there? Why is it there? Who put it there? Now, you see. And go a step further. You have your crime and your victim. Well, who is your criminal? The unknown X? He is some one whose guilt must explain all the circumstances, all the peculiarities and

divergences. All of them! Not nine when the tenth is unsatisfied—unexplained—for it is the tenth one that is of the greatest importance, eh?"

Mr. Guelpa's keen eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

"Eh? And that is why I am quite sure I have no time for lectures just at present. I am busy just now."

"Interesting," said Professor Ledsky, with one of his swift smiles. "I am glad you have found a case to interest you over here. It will give you a chance to see something of our methods—perhaps."

"Yes, perhaps. One never knows."

"It is the case you spoke of the day I met you?"

"Yes."

"The woman who was such an unusual type?"

"Ah, but I never saw her, Professor. Unfortunately she had gone."

"That is unfortunate, but I presume you will have another opportunity," Professor Ledsky went on, "though I do not just understand what you mean by gone?"

"I mean disappeared. I went to the house where she had been living, accompanied by an officer from the insurance company. The place was empty. She had vanished, slipped away in the night. Something had frightened her off."

"And what do you make of it, Mr. Guelpa?" Professor Ledsky asked gravely, as one who shared a colleague's perplexity.

"Ah, that is the question! First find your crime. And are we even sure of that? I think we are. Then your victim. But have we a victim? Yes, I can safely say we have. And the criminal? We can only say that some one has run away. A woman—and women are always running away," Mr. Guelpa concluded, venturing upon a time-worn cynicism, "away from something or after some one."

"And so this woman—the type you wished to study—"

"Mrs. Benton, the widow—yes."

"Has escaped?"

"Ah, ah," Mr. Guelpa exclaimed, and a smile twitched at his little black mustache, "but the house was watched!"

Mr. Guelpa had been roving craftily about the subject and now he had brought the conversation precisely to the point he had predestined. What he had to say was quite simple. And yet it was not easy to put it in words.

"Yes, Professor Ledsky, the house was watched—a wise precaution—and the detectives followed her."

"To be sure," Ledsky agreed, "they would. It was their business to do so."

"And where?" asked the little man smilingly, "where do you suppose she went?"

Professor Ledsky stared at Mr. Guelpa for a moment and then he said: "I have no idea."

"Of course not. How could you? Well, I

will tell you. The detectives declare the woman took refuge in your house—the country house to which you are good enough to welcome us to-day as your guests. Yes, they traced Mrs. Benton there.”

And with that Professor Ledsky slapped his hands together and laughed—good wholesome, high-keyed laughter. At the end of it he inquired, still smiling: “What mare’s nest is this, Mr. Guelpa?”

Mr. Guelpa knew his English as well as he knew the number of coincidental finger-prints that are found in 1,048,576 imprints—knew it as he knew the Besredka test for human blood; but this curious idiomatic phrase stumped him. He had never heard of the mare or her nest. Explanation made it clear: a queer blunder—a grotesque blunder.

“Of course if it had been at my offices here in town,” Professor Ledsky volunteered, “it might have been quite possible. Probable even, for I see many queer patients. But my house is sacred. That is my home and it is a long distance from here. And there, too, I have my famous laboratory. You may be sure I permit no outsider to visit me there. Except, Mr. Guelpa, such visitors as you. I am very proud of my laboratory. It is as nearly complete as money—a great deal of money—and endless devotion can make it.”

“I am looking forward to that,” Mr. Guelpa said brightly, “but about that woman—that Mrs. Benton—you say she couldn’t be a patient?”

"No—no—quite impossible. I never heard of her. Of course my work as an alienist brings me strange people, but this woman? No," Professor Ledsky declared positively, "I do not know this one. Besides my wife would have notified me of any such event. I only go up to my country place for the week-ends, but I am in constant communication with Mrs. Ledsky and my secretary who has been there all this week."

"A mistake of the detectives," was Mr. Guelpa's suggestion, "or perhaps—"

"A thousand perhappes will not help us, my dear Mr. Guelpa," the professor put in, "but you will! I'm glad you happen to be coming out to the house this afternoon. The pleasure of your company? I've wanted that. And my vanity is waiting for you to praise my laboratory. Now with your—what did you call it?—your unknown quantity, Madame X, thrown in, I am sure the mystery of Mrs. Benton will be cleared up to the satisfaction of us all."

The tall professor shot out of his chair and drew himself erect, all pride and cordiality.

"Mrs. Guelpa and your daughter," he added, "and your luggage—all is ready? We should be starting."

"Quite ready. There are only two bags. I trust we shall not crowd your car."

"No, no, there is plenty of room, and I am sure you will be comfortable."

Leaving his guest, Mr. Guelpa went into the adjoining rooms and rounded up his family and their possessions. Although she had almost been kept waiting Mrs. Guelpa's mood was serene. She took a real pleasure in sharing the fame that had come to her little husband from his books and lectures and was proud of him and his thirty years of difficult labor. As much as was good for him she showed her appreciation of his success; and she enjoyed seeing him face to face—and holding his own—with the famous scientists whose names she so often heard him quote.

"It was very kind of this lady to invite us," she told Julie, "though a call should have been made first—but of course, after all, this is America."

"Fa-ather," asked Julie, as she was putting on her hat, "what shall I do there?"

"You, my dear, will probably listen to instructive conversation. And then there is the world-famous Ledsky laboratory. I do not know what else. Of course you will eat. But science, my child, does not dance."

Julie's face gloomed.

"I don't see that I'll have much fun, fa-ather."

"My girl," Mr. Guelpa replied, "you will have your mother. If you are ready, come along. We must not keep Professor Ledsky waiting any longer."

Indeed it was Julie's good fortune to sit with her mother in the back seat of the big automobile all

the way, as it ran through New York and out the Westchester road. Mr. Guelpa and his host hobbled and sat together. The luggage was packed in with the chauffeur. Before long the conversation between Professor Ledsky and Mr. Guelpa fell away from trivialities. The white wonder of Central Park in winter held them for only a few moments. Professor Ledsky sat erect as was his wont, his black eyes roving to right and left; his hands in brown gloves played together in his lap like little dogs, one restlessly sliding over the other.

"It is indeed a pleasure to get possession of you for a few days, Mr. Guelpa," he remarked in that sudden urgent way of his, "an honor!"

"Thank you, I understand that you mean a compliment, but your language is so different, eh? There should be two words for honor—or four or a dozen. Now there is one kind of honor I have been fighting against all my life—the kind they bring into courts of justice. There is the old general, eh? You get him in the witness chair and you can not dig any truth out of him, if it goes against the honor of the army. Honor? It is a hodge-podge—that is your word—of contradictions. The doctor has an honor that ties his tongue—professional honor. So has the journalist. And a gentleman's honor makes him pay his gambling debts before he pays the milkman or the midwife. It is more honorable to belong to a parasitic profession than it is to dig food out of the earth to feed humanity. And the honor

of the family that consists in covering up the crime of one of its members, eh?"

The little man was riding one of his hobbies, and Professor Ledsky acknowledged his jockeyship with an approval.

"Families are breaking up," he said, "the new social trend is distinctly away from the home-group. Another generation, or so, will end it."

"But men and women will remain, eh? Now a woman puts her honor in refraining from certain acts that a man boasts of and gets a certain kind of honor from—ah, a dirty kind of honor if you wish, but it is all that sort of a man wants. No, Professor, the word means nothing, because it means a different thing for each of us."

"I agree with you, Mr. Guelpa, and yet science—"

"Ah, there we have an honor of our own. Like the lady-killer," Mr. Guelpa added with one of his grim chuckles, "yes, science has its standards of honor."

"And that, Mr. Guelpa?"

"Truth—though the house falls."

"Yes, you are right. To get at the truth—to establish it in a world of flux. That is what we try to do. Newton discovered a law of gravity and established it. Now we have torn it down. The first genius who found that two plus two made four invented something that has lasted so long that even now we have just found it is not always

true; and that it is possible for parallel lines to meet somewhere. But the honor of the scientist is in his determination to get the truth, no matter what he has to destroy."

"The search for truth," Mr. Guelpa acquiesced, "yes, there is nothing else worth while. Even though the truth crumples up into an outworn formula, and the parallel lines come clashing together."

"We are of one mind," Professor Ledsky agreed, shifting a trifle so he could stare down into the face of the little man; under his shaggy brows his eyes were like pits of coal, black and fathomless, "the ultimate truth—that is, all science is hunting, you among criminals, and I in aberrant minds and the obscurest holes in which life lurks. We are looking for the same truth."

It is a way the scientists have—this habit of repeating to each other the commonplaces of their pride in the work they do; it seems to bulk them up tremendously and make them realize that they are not as others are—shallow "sheiks" or the rag-tag and bob-head of femininity. So in this race of mutual approbation they ran neck and neck.

Meanwhile the swift automobile had rolled forty cold miles behind it; beyond, high on a hill, they could see the peaked roofs of an old, old stone house.

"That's it," Professor Ledsky announced, "my home—and you are welcome, indeed. My wife is

all expectation. It will be a great pleasure to her to meet your wife and daughter. She is very fond of young people, yes, particularly so. She is a young creature, herself."

Mr. Guelpa went on to say courteous guest-like things.

"I have asked a few people to meet you," the professor continued, "but they will not be staying in the house. I thought I should like to have you to myself—for a few days, at least. I have much to show you—if I may have your assistance in my laboratory."

"But it will be an honor," and Mr. Guelpa chuckled, as though he were aware of being facetious, "the right kind of an honor to be admitted to your method of work."

"And, you know, if after all my work does bore you, I hope I may have an opportunity of seeing Mr. Guelpa in action," Professor Ledsky returned politely.

"Me?" exclaimed Mr. Guelpa, "I? Ah, to be sure! Our talk had driven it out of my mind."

"Indeed! That woman, the morbid type you know, who escaped and whom the detectives thought they had traced to this old house of mine," a smile crossed the professor's sallow face and the thin hands ran to and fro in his lap, "you surely remember?"

"Of course I remember, but it was at the back of my mind, waiting. I never forget. Now if the

detectives have not made one of their stupid mistakes, possibly some of your servants may be implicated in Mrs. Benton's escape, eh?"

"I can hardly see how that can be possible. We have only three indoor servants and I am numbering my secretary and office assistant among them. He happens to be at the house now. I can answer for all these attendants, but—there, Mr. Guelpa, you have already begun—the scientific brain—the search for truth—however, I promise you a free hand to sift this mystery. Indeed, I am counting on your advice and aid." Professor Ledsky broke off, as the automobile, having breasted the hill, swung into the curving drive that led up to the house. What Mr. Guelpa and his family saw was a snow-swept garden, shut in by tall hedges, an old high-peaked stone house, with deep windows and steps going up to a massive door. Beyond the steps, near a corner of the mansion, grew a warped tree, with one aged branch bending down crookedly as though it were pointing at the door and announcing: "Here it is, Professor Ledsky's house—that's the entrance."

Snow wrapped the tree and the crooked branches and made them ghostly.

"Welcome," said Professor Ledsky; he was helping the ladies out of the car—first Mrs. Guelpa, who was somewhat stiff from the long ride and very dignified in her furs, and then Julie, round and blonde and speechless as an apricot.

Mr. Guelpa went toward the steps and the door of the stone house opened. And then Mr. Guelpa got a surprise. A man stood in the doorway. Mr. Guelpa glanced at him at first, quite casually and then with keen scrutiny. There was nothing very remarkable about him. Thick-set, of medium height, with a dull flat face, hair the color of ashes and twisted eyes that blinked at the sudden dazzle of sunlight and snow. He did not hold himself erect. He lounged there against the door he was holding.

Mr. Guelpa's little eyes snapped open and his little cane tapped the door-step. It was one of his aphorisms that one sees only what one looks at; and that one never looks at anything unless it is already in one's mind. Why, then, was he studying so intently this slumbrous, commonplace fellow in the doorway? He turned his eyes aside, seeing now the white deformed tree, the ledges beyond—

Whenever Mr. Guelpa felt he was on the edge of a mistake he took refuge, almost unconsciously, in scientific doubt, which is merely another name for never being sure of anything. It is the scientist's rock of safety. It had enabled him to shun many a disastrous error, upon which the glory of his career might have been wrecked. But there was in him—there had always been in him—an urgent imagination which would not be quiet, which had whispered to him the triumphant hypothesis of many a crime and brought him success. Imagination? It conjured up the picture of a thick man

lounging, one arm on the mantelpiece, staring slumbrously down at a woman who lay on a *chaise-longue* in the bedroom of a Narrow House—

Imagination—

As always it had outrun the fact.

And now the two had met and blended.

The man he had seen in fancy, lounging in Mrs. Benton's bedroom in town, he saw now lounging in the doorway—here in the old stone house of Professor Ledsky.

The Professor was speaking: "Cumber," he said, "give a hand with these bags."

As the man did so, Ledsky gave him a scrutinizing look.

"What has been going on here?" he asked sharply.

Cumber stared.

"Never mind now," the professor went on a trifle irritably. "Take in the bags."

The professor then turned his attention to the ladies. "Welcome to my home," he murmured cordially. "Permit me." And taking an arm of each he assisted them up the steps and ushered them into the house.

Meanwhile Mr. Guelpa had been watching the man addressed as Cumber.

He noted his slow walk, as he ascended the stairs, carrying the bags, his lounging gait, his thick-set body and above all his flat cold face—

CHAPTER IX

THE IMAGE AND THE MAN

THE old house built of stone hewed out of the hill on which it stood dated from Colonial days. It had been, of course, one of Washington's countless headquarters; and, in the years, had been many other things.

The grim exterior had never changed very much and the Ledskys left it as it was. The neglected garden had been tamed and was, in summer, bright with color of flower and leaf. Now it was a mere mowfield, but the hedges stood thick and upright as walls; and tree-dentistry had stopped with cement the holes time had dug in many of the ancient trees. Behind the house was a low stone building which had in the days long ago housed horses and carriages. Now it had been transformed into Professor Ledsky's famous laboratory, and a modern up-to-date garage built.

The interior of the house was probably what it had been two centuries ago, with its low-ceilinged rooms and narrow open stairways. The old-fashioned furniture made a home of it. The ancient chairs and settles and tall-boys were warm with old

color. In the broad living-room there were pictures—fields and belfries that had been painted in foreign lands, and old rugs, their high tones faded into restful browns and blues. It was a house in which time seemed to have stood still—halting in a reminiscent mood of tranquillity, after having gathered all the grave quiet beauty of the past. There was steam-heat but in the old-fashioned living-room a wood fire glowed in the wide chimney-place. There were electric lights, but most of the light in the room came from candles in sconces on the walls and from two shaded candles on the mantel. This evening it was a shadowy room—candle-light and firelight blending with each other; a room of quiet harmony and peace.

Mrs. Ledsky, slim and buoyant in her evening gown, was talking to the housekeeper. Her young face wore a matronly look of solicitude.

"I know it is awkward, Alva, trying to seat five at a square table and make it look right, but you must do the best you can. Mr. Guelpa at my right, of course, and Mrs. Guelpa at the professor's right, and her daughter at his left."

"That's the way I've done it, ma'am."

The housekeeper was a short square woman, no longer young, capable-looking; she would have fitted into a Swedish background.

"I hope cook has done her best with the dinner."

"She has, ma'am," the housekeeper rejoined, "and dinner's all ready now," and making a right-hand turn, she marched out of the room. Her foot-

steps made a little noise in the hall and then died away.

Somewhere a clock gave the hour; eight o'clock. The professor came swiftly into the room where his wife stood.

"Dinner, of course. I have just told Alva to make up word. They'll be down in a moment," he said. In his evening clothes he seemed lankier and taller than ever. "Your gown is charming. Have you seen it before?"

"Of course you have seen it before, but I'm glad you like it," she said, glancing down at the greenish silken thing which was her gown; swinging a jade necklace that fell nearly to her knees.

"I must thank you for making the Guelpas so comfortable, but you are always good to my friends as well as to your own and I think you'll like them."

"They seem very nice indeed. Especially Mr. Guelpa. He's a little old dear. And the young girl—you know how very fond I am of young people. I am so glad they brought her."

"Yes, yes, Eleanor, but here they come," her husband said in his quick nervous way.

With that the Guelpas came in. Mrs. Guelpa was stately and gracious. For the first time since her arrival in America she felt she had stepped into a real home—just such a home of quiet dignity and homely warmth as she herself had been born into in provincial France. Something of this sort she said to her hostess, and Julie gravely translated it in schoolgirl English.

"Ah, Mrs. Guelpa means more than that," Mr. Guelpa said quickly, "she was enchanted with the rooms you have given us. They are charming. And the flowers!"

He had a rose in his buttonhole, and a cluster of roses clung to Julie's round waist. It was of the flowers and the spacious bedrooms overhead and the quaint stairways they talked as they moved into the dining-room. There, too, was light from squat candles on the table and from a crackling fire; it glittered on the silver and crystal and was absorbed by the dark paneled walls. They dined in a little oasis of light. There were glasses at each place, and Alva filled the smaller ones with wine the color of topaz.

"*Tiens, tiens!*" Mr. Guelpa exclaimed, "but this is a miracle."

"Pre-war stock," the professor protested smilingly, "and a hundred years from now our descendants will still be drinking it."

"For me I do not care about those descendants—not even Julie's—but this is the first time I have dined since I left the ship. We wicked Frenchmen, you know, do not know how to dine without this!" and Mr. Guelpa raised his glass and drank to his hostess.

She acknowledged the courtesy with a smile that came and went so rapidly it seemed merely a flash across her face. But it was echoed, he noticed, in her eyes. Mr. Guelpa's immediate decision was that

ne was exquisite, something dainty and precious; ne young regular face was framed in soft clusters f curls, bobbed in the prevailing fashion. It was ery becoming.

Alva's service had been quietly perfect and when ne had gone away, for the last time, they lingered ver the nuts and raisins and an old bottle of "pre-ar" Burgundy. It was then Mr. Guelpa leaned oward his host.

"I have been wondering," he observed casually, whether you have any news."

"I have been waiting to tell you," was the quick eply. "I am really puzzled."

"Puzzled about what?" Mrs. Ledsky asked.

She had been engaged in conversation with Mrs. uelpa and broke off abruptly as her husband's ords reached her.

"A queer thing, Eleanor," the professor ex-lained, laying down the thin black cigar he had een smoking, and tapping the table to some indef-ite tune. "There is a woman, perhaps a criminal oman—"

Mr. Guelpa interjected a "possibly."

"Who escaped from a house in New York and, ell, she was followed by detectives. Followed, and aced to this house."

"Here!" Mrs. Ledsky exclaimed.

"Yes, it is very curious," Mr. Guelpa said, "and ook the liberty of mentioning it to Mrs. Guelpa. e have no secrets, my dear. Eh?"

"I've not had an opportunity of explaining to Eleanor," Professor Ledsky continued, "and indeed I know only what you told me, Mr. Guelpa."

"The facts? They are very simple. A man died recently in New York, a strong young man. He was heavily insured in his wife's favor. A Mrs. Benton. She was suspected of having—eh?—having perhaps something to do with his sudden death. Poison, you think, Professor? That will be almost impossible to prove, for the body has been cremated. But the insurance people had the woman's house watched. By day and night. And when she slipped out in the dark the detectives followed her. There was nothing for which they could arrest her. So they followed—followed a devious trail, which they report ended—here!"

"Here!" Mrs. Ledsky repeated, fear widening her eyes, "in our house!"

"So they said. She entered and she did not come out."

"But this is a mistake," protested Mrs. Ledsky now thoroughly frightened, "there is no such person here. How could there be?"

"That, my dear, is precisely what Mr. Guelpa told me. That the woman entered our house and did not come out. Annoying, isn't it? There is no occasion for alarm, but you can imagine how glad I am to have Mr. Guelpa with us. I need not tell you he is the very greatest criminologist living today. And the pleasure of having him here is dou-

led by the fact we can give him a little problem to make his visit more interesting."

It was evident that Mrs. Ledsky was astonished.

"But why should such a person choose our house where her detection would be sure?"

"My dear Eleanor," the professor replied, "I do not think she did. The detectives blundered."

Mrs. Ledsky was relieved. She turned to Mrs. Guelpa and resumed her conversation which Mr. Guelpa's announcement had interrupted.

Professor Ledsky had spoken to his wife with the utmost calm. He not only spoke calmly. He was calm. Mr. Guelpa was astonished. This was not the Ledsky he had known at their first meeting. That man had vibrated like delicate steel springs; he had quivered with nervous impatience. Mr. Guelpa remembered how the dark eyes had blazed with intellectual enthusiasm. Of course that had been when Ledsky was a-gallop on his scientific hobby. Now he was his normal self, quick of thought and word but more like other folk. Mr. Guelpa thought he liked better the fiery enthusiast, but he was not quite sure. Professor Ledsky in his home was delightful. Delightful too, with his young wife, undoubtedly a very sensitive and highly strung temperament. He seemed to show her more than usual gentleness. Indeed there was something in his manner toward her that differed from his courtesy to his guests. It was deferential, protective, conciliatory. As it should be.

"Perhaps," and Mr. Guelpa took up the professor's remark, "the detectives did blunder. It is so hard not to. A woman seen in the dark, lost it may be, seen again. Yes, a blunder is possible. But could they have been mistaken in seeing some woman enter this house? One of your patients, professor—an aberrant woman—with a crazed brain—seeking your help in her poor mad way."

"If she were hidden here now!" Mrs. Ledsky exclaimed, again taking up the conversation. "I am quite brave, Mr. Guelpa, but I'm afraid of mad people; that is why the professor never sees any patients here."

"I can put you at ease about that, Eleanor," the professor interposed. "There is no such person in the house or on the premises. I've questioned all our people. They know nothing. They have seen no one. Mr. Guelpa, it is all a mare's nest, as I told you."

"You are sure then of your people?"

"Entirely. I've had a talk with the cook, Amanda, and with Mrs. Spiller, the housekeeper—I assure you they have neither seen your mysterious criminal, much less hidden her away."

"And your Cumber?" Mrs. Ledsky asked suddenly; her voice was low but there was an unexpected note of bitterness in it.

Her husband stared at her under his shaggy brows, for a moment, and then a smile lit up his hollow face.

"Pardon me," he said, "I must explain that Cumber is our one bone of domestic contention. Isn't it, Eleanor?"

"You know I have never liked him, never trusted him," Mrs. Ledsky retorted, "in fact, I hate him."

Her young face was flushed and there were blue lights of anger in her eyes.

"You would have got rid of him long ago—if you had been willing to listen to me!"

"Poor Cumber!" and Professor Ledsky laughed abruptly, and the lean fingers once more tapped faintly the same tune on the table, "Mrs. Ledsky is quite irreconcilable. Woman's prejudice, Mr. Guelpa, though I must admit the poor fellow is not a very cheerful person around the house. Perhaps I could do without him, but I haven't the heart—really, Eleanor, I haven't the heart to send him away. Of course he is useful to me. My right-hand man in the laboratory. Absolutely trustworthy. But it is only because I understand him. Anywhere else he'd be like a lost dog." He was presenting his apology for Cumber with a little of his old urgency.

"Cumber?" Mr. Guelpa inquired, "the man we saw at the door?"

"Yes. Poor fellow. It was years ago when I was lecturing at the Medical College. He came to me, a friendless lad, penniless, without kith or kin. And yet in that boy was a fine ambition—an inborn love for knowledge. You have seen that type, Mrs.

Guelpa," the professor turned to her with a polite endeavor to draw her into the conversation. "Just a miserable, clumsy, thwarted creature of the underworld, with a tireless ambition to climb up into the world of thought, of knowledge, of science, of—honor. It touched me deeply, I admit, and I have done what I could for him. He became a sort of handy man for me. He tried to push through the classes and get a degree. But he failed, failed—early hardships had stunted the brain, I dare say. He is a strong man now physically but somewhat mentally dull. Still I haven't the heart to turn him adrift. He is faithful, useful—and really," he turned to his wife, "really Eleanor, he does no harm. His defects are due to his wretched childhood. Surely he is not to be blamed for that?"

His persuasive appeal for Cumber met with sympathetic approval from Julie and she said as much; but it did not appear to soften Mrs. Ledsky.

"Of course you'll stand by him, you always have," she retorted, and again blue lights of anger shone in her eyes.

Mr. Guelpa poured oil on the matrimonial discussion; for to the professor he said, "Ah, it is hard to break old links, especially those of protection—for some one you have helped on for years," and he told Mrs. Ledsky, "But I can see why there is no particular reason you should share that feeling. I quite understand."

"My wife has such a kind heart," the professor

out in with a smile, "I am the more puzzled at this antagonism against a dependent."

Mrs. Ledsky made no reply. She began talking to Mrs. Guelpa and Julie on personal matters, endeavoring, it was easily seen, to enliven the rather gloomy atmosphere which had settled down on the dinner table. But the two men still continued to ride their hobby in spite of all her tact and ingeniousness.

Mr. Guelpa mused for a moment; then continued:

"Cumber? Yes. The man we met at the door, when we arrived? That was Cumber? I noticed him. And you say you have questioned him about the woman?"

"Yes, very carefully," Professor Ledsky replied, "and he is certain no such woman came here. He has not left the place. Cumber is slow, but he is observant. You may be sure that his statement is correct."

"Yes, yes," Mr. Guelpa nodded approval, "of course. And you, Mrs. Ledsky—that is also your opinion?"

Mrs. Ledsky laughed.

"My opinion, Mr. Guelpa? But you know my husband thinks my opinion of his Cumber is based on prejudice and therefore not worth anything. Don't you, Hugo? And I've said what I think of him." She appealed to Mrs. Guelpa, who understood scarcely a word of what had been the topic of

conversation. "And it is tiresome for you to hear nothing but Cumber, isn't it?"

"I understand so little," Mrs. Guelpa murmured in her broken English, "to me it does not much matter what is talked about," and she smiled.

"Mother hopes to learn to speak English," Julie interposed with the diffidence of the young French girl, "don't you, mother?"

"Yes, yes—some time."

Mrs. Ledsky rose.

"Come. The coffee is in the living-room."

She stood up impulsively, forcing her guests to their feet. She took Julie's arm with one hand and Mr. Guelpa's with another and swept them out of the room leaving her husband to follow with Mrs. Guelpa.

"I am sorry," she whispered to Mr. Guelpa, "but I do hate that tiresome man. And I hope he was listening—he would be! Well, he heard what I thought of him. But, oh, Mr. Guelpa, I hope you do not think I was very rude."

"I think you are always charming, my dear hostess; and I believe Julie agrees with me? Eh, Julie?"

"Yes, fa-ather, I do. And I am sure that man is quite horrid."

Mrs. Ledsky gave Julie's arm a sympathetic little squeeze.

"I have one partisan anyhow."

In order to meet her eyes Mr. Guelpa had to

lance up. They were gray eyes, he noticed, with temperamental spots of blue. And her exquisite face was still flushed with emotion; anger it may be. She left them at the door and went swiftly to the coffee-table beckoning Julie to follow. She was standing there, outlined against the firelight when the others entered, Julie helping with the coffee-service.

For the first time Mr. Guelpa looked at her attentively. Little by little her image impressed itself on his mind—never to be erased. She was taller than he, but not tall for a woman; a young graceful figure, high-bosomed, with sloping white shoulders and slim flanks sheathed in the narrow modish gown. She was never quite still although all her movements were harmonious, melting one into the other. She held her little head high, with its cluster of soft brown curls. Her face was classic and very beautiful in its contour, but there was more than beauty in it—a shadow of loneliness that vanished only when something stirred her deeply; when she was all brightness, gaiety, youthfulness. Mr. Guelpa had seen this shadowy loneliness disappear when her anger against Cumber had risen. He took the cup of coffee she handed him with a smile of thanks and a bow.

"You see, I am already making Julie useful," he said.

"I wish you would make her help her mother with her English."

"I am going to do that, too, Mr. Guelpa, and when you gentlemen have finished your coffee, I hope to induce Mrs. Guelpa to give us some music. I understand she is a musician."

Mr. Guelpa was pleased. He glanced admiringly at his wife who was drinking the coffee Julie had just handed her.

"Do you understand that, my dear?"

"I am afraid I did not quite catch the meaning, Jules."

"Mrs. Ledsky wishes to know if you will give us some music." He spoke French.

"With great pleasure," Mrs. Guelpa smiled and nodded.

The ladies having seated themselves near the coffee-table with a congenial topic of conversation, Mr. Guelpa placed himself beside the professor who said abruptly:

"About this woman, Mr. Guelpa, it is a nuisance. It has disturbed my wife. The horrible idea that any one, perhaps a criminal, should be hidden in the house has made her nervous. And then with that confirmed prejudice against poor Cumber she may be imagining all sorts of things."

"Yes," Mr. Guelpa assented blankly, but for a second or two he gave no other answer; he, too, was imagining things: the man who had met him on the door-step was Cumber, and with that figure lounging at the door, Mr. Guelpa was comparing a mental image he had built up in that bedroom in

the Narrow House, where some one very similar lounged. The image and the man resembled each other. Or did they? One is liable to blunder when one is trusting only to imagination.

"It should be easy to set Mrs. Ledsky's mind at rest," he said at last. "Of course you have made a thorough search."

"We've been all over the garden, though a kitten couldn't hide there. The laboratory and the garage—and they are locked—and the house from cellar to garret. I tell you it is a mistake! My house!" and the professor's black eyes blazed down at the little man.

"And Mrs. Ledsky is still alarmed?"

"You have seen for yourself."

"True, and we must not let her be alarmed. Mrs. Guelpa, too, and Julie! I fear they are also a trifle uncomfortable. A criminal, perhaps an insane woman, hiding, creeping about in your quiet home, eh? As you say, it is horrible."

"Silly and horrible, yes."

"Why not try again? Of course we know it is a blunder, eh? But if we can assure the ladies it is—what do you call it?—the mare's nest, they will be more comfortable. Women like certainty."

"It is what I was about to propose. In fact I'm glad you are here—if it were only for that!" The professor was alert, quivering with the urgency he had shown when he galloped his scientific hobby for Mr. Guelpa's benefit.

"And the servants? May I see them first?"

"Of course. At once."

"And Cumber?"

"Cumber? Certainly," the professor repeated impatiently, "at once, at once."

"They will no doubt be in the kitchen? We will begin there," and without waiting for a reply, Mr. Guelpa reassured the ladies: "We are going to lay that naughty little ghost that annoys you! And you will remain here quiet and safe until we return. My wife will play for you, Mrs. Ledsky. And while we are gone you can make sure the windows are locked. And you shall turn the keys in the doors—I see this room has two doors—and when we come back we shall all laugh at our fears together. Eh, Julie?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Brave child!"

The little man of science was mysterious, smiling, playful, all in one; and his beady eyes twinkled behind his glasses. Mrs. Guelpa deigned to recognize his cheerful mood and Julie nodded. Their hostess did not speak, but her eyes followed the two men until the door closed behind them.

In the kitchen at the back of the house and separated from it by a hallway, the chatter died out suddenly as they entered. It was evidently the cook who had been talking at full speed. This Amanda was a lean active woman, of forty-five or more, whose deeply lined face told of a somewhat crusty

temper, due to hot stoves or long spinsterhood. She was putting on her hat and coat, preparatory to her home-going. She lived with a married sister in one of the houses below the hill. There she found the lacking sort of gossip she needed. And it was evident from the set of her prim face that this evening Amanda was well primed for talk. She was holding in the story of the runaway woman, of the detectives, of the search of the house. And now Mr. Guelpa's questions were to add a bit to her tale.

"This is Amanda," said Professor Ledsky by way of introduction.

Mr. Guelpa bowed and smiled; and with a few questions probed her and found her quite empty of information; all she knew was the talk of the kitchen and she had been the chief contributor to it.

"I shall see you to the gate, Amanda," the professor said. "We are keeping it locked to-night. Cumber will let you in when you come to-morrow morning."

"Well, I never!" gasped Amanda. "Why, you'll feel like prisoners."

"No, we shall only feel more secure."

He went out with her, while Mr. Guelpa, low voiced and sympathetic, interrogated Alva Spiller. The housekeeper had been sitting squarely on a wooden chair, but she rose when Mr. Guelpa addressed her. Her peasant face was meaningless as a slab of clay. The little Frenchman's genial ques-

tioning brought no glimmer of intelligence into her. Her flat eyes showed no emotion. She was calm, stolid, emotionless. She answered readily enough, each response a yes or a no, sir. She had seen nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. But if she had caught a woman like that in the house—

She left the menace unfinished and relapsed into taciturnity.

However, Mr. Guelpa got from her the few details he wanted. She had not left the house and no one had entered. She had been over it from top to bottom—every room—and no one was hidden in it. She was still saying yes or no to questions of this sort when Professor Ledsky came in.

“The gate is locked,” he said quickly, “and—you don’t mind, Alva—”

He turned the key in the outer kitchen door and dropped it in his pocket.

“And now, Mr. Guelpa, I should like you to go over the house with me once more, and if I have missed anything I do not think you will. Cumber,” the professor addressed his assistant for the first time, “you may come with us.”

He led the way and they went out, leaving Alva, stolid and motionless, on the wooden chair. And the search of the old house led them far. They flashed up the electric lights in the cellars. They probed the corners with torchlights, and turned over old boxes and rubbish. Nothing, of course. No woman to be dragged out of a dusty hiding-place.

And Mr. Guelpa had not expected anything so obvious. But suppose a woman had really been followed to the house and later had escaped from it unseen. Some one aiding her, perhaps. But short as may have been her stay, she must have left some trace—some impress of matter on matter: the hollow where the fugitive hare has rested. And yet—

And yet Mr. Guelpa's investigation was perfunctory. He stood in the old cellars—passed from one to the other—while Cumber did the heavy work of search, probing, overturning anything that might have offered shelter, while Professor Ledsky rapped out impatient commands. Empty the long halls and the store-rooms on the kitchen floor. The old-fashioned closets and the rooms on the ground floor were drawn without result. And they went up to the bedrooms. Professor Ledsky, all nerves and impetuosity, was ahead. Then Cumber, and Mr. Guelpa followed, his quick eyes seeing everything. They visited the suite occupied by the Guelpas—two bedrooms with a bath and a dressing-room between them. Across the way a suite similarly arranged where the Ledskys slept. At the back were two smaller guest chambers and another bath. Everywhere was the orderliness of good housekeeping. It was an old home kept young—mellow as age and fresh as youth.

"You'll want a look at everything, I know," Professor Ledsky had said, as he threw open the closets in his suite. His own was filled with gar-

ments, mostly black, all on hangers; his shoes were treed and neatly ranged on a narrow shelf.

"I like order," he explained curtly, "and thanks to Cumber I get it."

Mrs. Ledsky's closet, wide and deep, was also filled with hanging garments; and as her husband tossed them to and fro there came a faint odor, delicate as that of far-off flowers.

"*Tiens! tiens!*" protested Mr. Guelpa, reproachfully, "we must not intrude here. You are a bold husband to do that."

"Perhaps that's just what Mrs. Ledsky is afraid of—some one creeping out of her closet at night. The poor girl is excessively nervous. She thinks she is brave, but she never retires without looking under the bed for some terrible visitor."

"That seems to be a fear many woman inherit."

"Yes, it's heredity—one of heredity's dark burdens, just as men have to carry old atavisms of violence," Professor Ledsky ran his long fingers through his hair, ruffling it back from his forehead. "It is a study that will lead us far."

"Yes, yes, and since there is nothing to keep us here," Mr. Guelpa suggested, "shall we go on?"

"There are a few rooms above. Cumber's bedroom. Alva's, too; and a room the cook sometimes occupies when she sleeps here, which on stormy nights she usually does. That is all—except a trunk-room. Go on, Cumber. Turn on the lights."

Behind them from cellar to this floor they had

left the lights shining. A narrow enclosed staircase led up to what had once been a sloping garret and was now divided into habitable rooms. The carpet was slightly worn, perhaps by Cumber's shuffling feet and Alva Spiller's peasant tread. It was Alva's room at the end of the hall—small, but furnished with old comfortable things; the bed had tall slim posts. There was a square of brownish carpet on the floor and white curtains at the windows. At one side of the room were open shelves and rows of hooks, where Alva's simple work-a-day clothes were displayed.

The trunk-room was next. It did not hold them long, though Cumber, apparently always willing, tossed the trunks about. Mr. Guelpa watched him. It was not that Mr. Guelpa seemed disinterested. He was talkative and alert, though he did not share the professor's nervous impatience. But his eyes went often to the slumbrous man, slow-footed, rather somber in his worn black clothes, who accompanied them from room to room; and had spoken scarcely a dozen words.

"This is my room," he said, at last breaking silence; he opened a door and punched up the light. It was a rather long narrow room exactly opposite the one Amanda sometimes occupied and which had told them nothing. It filled precisely the space of the two smaller chambers across the way. It was bare and simple. There were three large pieces of furniture; a colonial bed, a broad table of pine-

wood, covered with books and writing material, and a huge stuffed chair, deformed by age. On one wall were half a dozen shelves filled with books—school-books, apparently, text-books, medical books, dictionaries—

“Ah, you are a student, Mr. Cumber, now I might have known it,” Mr. Guelpa said genially, “and what a quiet retreat this is. A student. A recluse. I am sure there is an invisible sign on the door, eh?” and Mr. Guelpa chuckled at his own humor. “And it reads: ‘No women admitted!’”

“That’s right,” Cumber answered shortly, “this is my room and I keep it to myself. Look where you please.”

“It is hardly worth while, is it?” said Mr. Guelpa; he glanced carelessly round the room, “Ah, you are better off than Mistress Alva—I see you have a closet, eh?”

He opened the door of the closet. Not many clothes hung there—it was a skimp wardrobe even for one who was a mere hanger-on of the illustrious scientist. Mr. Guelpa paused scarcely a moment; and yet in that moment he had seen precisely what he had expected to see—the one thing that had beckoned him as he had followed his companions in that tedious search of the stone house. And his eyes trained to observation needed only that fleeting moment.

What hung in front of him was an old tweed coat, worn at the elbows to threadbare nakedness,

and with loose tufts here and there on the sleeves; only a dark gray coat.

His smile was genial as ever, when he swung about in his dapper way and faced the room. Indeed he rather beamed on Cumber, who was lounging in front of the cold fireplace, one elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

That man was Cumber and that gray coat in the closet was his coat.

"*Tiens! tiens!*" In that heavy drooping figure he recognized the man his imagination had built up in Mrs. Benton's room—just so he had pictured him leaning on the mantel, staring down at the couch on which she lay, leaving his imprint—elbow-print of a worn gray coat—

Just so. There was the man. The image and the man were one, now; they had melted into each other as shadow melts into substance.

And Mr. Guelpa's approving smile was wholly for himself.

He had touched, he knew, the edge of the mystery of the Narrow House, where crime had played hide-and-seek.

CHAPTER X

THE GRAY COAT

IT CHANCED to be a frost-bound winter, but many of Professor Ledsky's friends and associates braved the cold ride to his country place. The illustrious scientist was not a forthcoming man. He was widely known to the public by his lectures and his publications and by his appearance now and then as expert, in some case of importance; but he gave little time to social life, and rarely fraternized even with his colleagues and fellow-workers in science. Perhaps it was his very aloofness that drew them to him when he opened his door, as he did during Mr. Guelpa's visit; perhaps it was the opportunity of meeting the famous French criminal scientist that drew them. At all events they came. There were luncheons and dinners in the paneled dining-room and interminable talks in the laboratory. Fusty old men of science and smart young ones met and quarreled and revered each other—always with certain reservations. Mr. Guelpa had golden chances for riding his string of hobbies; and being no foe to talking he talked. And into those cantering conversations Professor Ledsky had

curious leaping way—sudden and short as though he were taking a hurdle—of entering. Then smoothing down his hair and his enthusiasm he would relapse into silence and listen to his guests. A charming host, provocative and sympathetic. The week-end stretched into days.

And so for those few days Mr. Guelpa fared well. His family fared equally well. Mrs. Guelpa loved the ripe comfort of the old house and found her kind of pleasure in thundering on the piano. Julie was placid and gloomy as a mother-ridden child.

Then one day—it was a Sunday—there came one of Mrs. Ledsky's friends with her two girls: the Netleys.

Mrs. Netley was a tall faded woman who had been pretty, but seemed to be somewhat cowed by maternity. One of her daughters, Dora, was a ripe girl, almost a woman. She was all curves. No girl could be so good as she appeared to be. She looked as though she had never seen an apple and wouldn't know one if she saw it. As far as demure innocence went, she apparently had Eve backed off the landscape.

Her sister was a kindling lass of fifteen. Her name was Marian. But she signed her numerous letters "Mary Ann," or "Merely Me." She was all silk stockings and delightful little squeals of laughter and when she nodded her flaming bobbed head she displayed a clean-shaven neck and bones where

her shoulders would be. Both the Netley girls amazed, astounded and delighted Julie. The firm but not tyrannical way they kept Mrs. Netley in order, filled her with awe—and she took a sideling glance at her own regal mother.

This look, swift and secret, was intercepted by Mrs. Ledsky and rewarded with a smile of perfect comprehension.

A simple thing, but at that instant Julie's future—for good or ill—was decided for all time. A strange thing; for in the young matron's smile Julie read not only understanding but sympathy so true that she realized she had made her first woman friend. A great moment. Filled with the seeds of futurity. Her eyes sent back adoration.

The general conversation ran into French, for the Netleys had been much abroad, and Mrs. Ledsky, laughing at her own blunders, managed to keep within it.

It was Mary Ann, flapping about from chair to chair, who finally found herself sitting beside Julie. After a sweet little squeal of laughter—just to announce herself—she whispered: "I'm engaged—and mother's furious."

Julie was filled with awe. Her mild eyes opened wide before this revelation.

"Your mother does not approve? Then how can you be engaged? Besides you are so young," she said gravely, "no wonder."

"Young? I'm fifteen. But of course it may not last. I've been engaged three times, you see, and you can't tell. But you've got to try them out, haven't you?" And all the sex-wisdom of flapperdom looked out of the girl's reddish eyes, as she added, "It may be mere infatuation."

Julie's young being was shaken with horror and curiosity. In her old-country world a betrothal was as serious and almost as unbreakable as marriage; she, too, had had her dream of love, but always it appeared against a background of fathers and mothers getting together, of formal dinners and meetings of family lawyers, of soft conversations—tête-à-tête in the drawing-room—while mother pretended to be reading a book, a stealthy pressure of hands at parting, perhaps even a dare-devil kiss on the cheek, for a gentleman respects the girl who is to be his wife—his, you understand and therefore a precious possession to be handled reverently.

And this was in Julie's mind as she gazed at the bewildering Mary Ann—all curled red hair and shaved neck and silk legs and eyes that mocked her with the terrible sagacities of flapperdom.

Then curiosity, greatly daring, overcame her terror of this young demon. She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Has—he given you a kiss?" she found herself saying.

Mary Ann stared; then she squealed like some extraordinary musical baby-pig; again she stared—

no! Julie was not guying her; she hauled down her laughter until it was a mere giggle:

"You don't have to get engaged for that," she said.

"That?"

"Kiss a man. Getting engaged has nothing to do with that. Of course when you get engaged men always make you promise never to kiss any one else," again she emitted an entrancing squeal; "aren't they silly asses? Of course I always promise. That's half the fun. But this time," Mary Ann went on and her little face took on a look of perfect delight, "I simply adore him. Oh, damn, I hope it's not just another infatuation. I just worship him. He's so different—sometimes I think he's crazy."

"Crazy? You mean insane," Julie was bewildered; it was all too deep for her.

"H'm, h'm," Mary Ann nodded, tapping her forehead, "belfry. Bats."

"I am so very sorry—"

"What are you sorry about? He can't help it. He's French."

"French—but—"

"All Frenchmen are like that. And Paul is just the same as the others, that's all."

Julie got in another exclamation.

"Paul!" she repeated quickly.

"Paul Dupuis—isn't it a peach of a name. Say, I want it. Marianne Dupuis. That's one reason

why I love him, I suppose. If only he were a count! Anyway he's the funniest old dear—if he'd only get a hair-cut—”

“We know Mr. Paul Dupuis,” Julie remarked very calmly, though all sorts of wild things were racing about inside her. “His father is the banker in Paris. Fa-ather knows him and mother, too.”

“My Paul Dupuis?”

“Yes, he came over on the ship with us.”

“Mummy!” this was a wild scream from the child of all the sagacities, “what do you think! Miss Guelpa knows my Paul!”

“My dear, you might—”

“Paul Dupuis! To think of their being friends!”

“Only acquaintances,” Julie said placidly. “We met him on shipboard, but my step-father, Mr. Guelpa, knew his father, so he was introduced—I think it was the third day out—”

“I don't know as I like it,” Mary Ann declared judiciously, “but anyway he's here. He is visiting the Emory people—the dearest friends of ours.”

Julie was in deep water. The slim figure that had begun to haunt her girlish dreams was that of Paul Dupuis; and it was a boyish figure, with a quiet face—rather wistful it looked in her dreams—with mysterious eyes the color of deep sea-water, and longish pale hair; a dreamer who seemed rightly to belong to dreams. And Julie had walked the deck with him dreamily in the rolling ship. She

felt Mrs. Ledsky's eyes upon her. They were the eyes of her new friend. They understood, they comforted, they promised. She turned again to Mary Ann and tried to talk to her; but she did not know what to say. Paul was betrothed to this young girl. She tried not to look at the painted mouth—so exquisite and loosely adventurous, the primness all kissed out of it, a smile always lurking in it, like a provocation—like bait. She did not hear much of the conversation now; she hardly listened; they were all chattering English, save her mother who covered her silence with an unyielding social smile. She was glad when the Netleys finally went away. They had all kissed her. Mary Ann had kissed her.

She ran up-stairs and washed her face. And that night the familiar dream of Paul Dupuis did not come. She woke toward dawn from a troubled vision in which she had seen two men; they were standing together there, hour after hour, it seemed to her; they were speaking in a low voice, so low she could not hear a word they said; there were gestures, too, but quite meaningless; and everything in the dream was suspicious, equivocal, menacing, it went on and on: and then Eleanor Ledsky—her new friend—glided into it and the two men stared at her; it was as though there were something in the staring eyes of the men that pushed her back and farther back out of the dream until she vanished.

She waited impatiently until it was late enough

to seek out her hostess. That was nearly ten o'clock. She found Mrs. Ledsky in the living-room. They came together, as by a sort of instinct, and, for the first time, kissed each other good morning. Their eyes challenged each other and found the answer good. It was an unexpected friendship, one of those beautiful things that come too rarely into the lives of women. And almost without words they disclosed themselves to each other. And their sudden friendship—uniting their wild differences of race, age and experiences—seemed to be something immemorially old that they remembered out of scores of past lives. They did not speak of it. Perhaps they did not wholly realize the depth of this new strange sympathy. They merely touched the surface of it, speaking lightly of the unfamiliar thing. But sitting there in the morning light Julie confided to Eleanor Ledsky the first secret she had ever confided to any one. She had never thought it possible she would let another than herself look into her secret stronghold, where she dwelt alone with her dream and girlish reticences. And now she opened every door, see, this is the real *me*.

And Paul—

An hour later, Mr. Guelpa, who was in deep dispute with Professor Ledsky in the laboratory, heard a familiar voice bleating and swift feet on the frozen path outside. He opened the door and saw Julie. And she was running. It might be that

in Julie's eighteen docile years Mr. Guelpa had sometimes seen her run, but never like this. Her feet danced and her eyes danced and seemingly all the plump life-cells in her young body were dancing, too. He went toward her fending her off with both arms, for he feared anything might happen—an embrace, even.

With one final bleat of "Fa-ather," Julie pulled herself up.

"Julie, you are ecstatic," he said, waving her off, "and I refuse to be the step-father of an ecstatic child. What has happened to you? Collect your thoughts and put them in order."

"Fa-ather, it's a dance. To-day. We are going to have a dance to-day. A *thé-dansant*!" her ecstasy was unabated.

"Is this the way dancing takes you?" Mr. Guelpa inquired.

"Fa-ather, lots of girls are coming—and men. And Paul—I mean Mr. Dupuis."

"*Tiens!* That interests you!"

"Fa-ather, I thought you liked him."

"Certainly I do, Julie, and I am glad you are going to have a dance. And of course you are pleased to meet some one from home, eh? There, tell me all about it but be quick, otherwise we shall freeze."

And Julie told him all about it as quickly as she could.

The Netleys had called; and they knew the

Emorys and Paul was their guest; and like a flash Mrs. Ledsky arranged this party. It had been as simple as that. And Julie who felt that she had, like Columbus, discovered America, explained how it had all been done. Mrs. Ledsky was the cleverest—and dearest—thing you ever saw. She had asked the Netleys, of course, and she had merely taken up the telephone. Last night and this morning. This morning especially. She had talked to dozens of people, smiling and nodding at the telephone, and she had got a little crowd. And some would stay to dinner. And then she had gone back to that miraculous telephone and ordered a band for the music—the jazziest music and all black boys, and a caterer with everything to eat and drink and waiters in white ties and white coats—Oh, Fa-ather, why isn't there a telephone like that in Paris! The America Columbus stumbled upon never amazed him so much as this one Julie had discovered. And Paul—

"I'm glad you are going to have a bit of gaiety, my dear," Mr. Guelpa observed in his best step-fatherly manner, "and now go and tell your mother the rest of it. I am keeping Professor Ledsky waiting. And he has wisdom on the tip of his tongue. Incidentally I am freezing."

Indeed he had left the professor in the middle of a sentence. What was it? Some theory or other. Mr. Guelpa remembered two words. He reentered the laboratory without an apology:

"Shifting sands, you were saying, how true it is," he remarked.

Professor Ledsky whirled round and ran his long fingers through his mass of hair.

"Shifting sands, yes, that is all we have built on—guess-work. All the old facts science thought it had acquired and established have changed their faces. They have taken off their old marks and put on new ones, and the science we try to build up out of them is a helter-skelter thing that changes as we touch it—scientific guess-work."

The laboratory in which Professor Ledsky was letting himself go to sympathetic ears, was known by repute wherever there are men who seek in matter the secrets of life, but its doors had admitted few visitors. Professor Ledsky was a pioneer, who worked alone, making his own experiments, quarrying out his own facts. That may have been why he preferred an assistant no more expert than the slumbrous Cumber. He was jealous of his work hiding it from the world until it was ripe for disclosure—and new glory blazed round his name.

The transformation of the old coach-house, of which only the stone walls remained, had given two ample apartments: the first room was a sort of library filled with charts, with books and records in all languages; beyond was the experimental laboratory; and a fortune had gone to its creation and continuous renewal. Here the windows were blocked. Daylight came from above; and the artificial light

and color could be brought to life by every known contrivance. On tables, on stands, on bases of metal and cement, were the machines, dainty or monstrous, devised by man for quarrying into living matter—instruments so delicate they could weigh the sediment condensed from the moisture on the temples of a woman in agony, or a man's red deposit of anger; monstrous prying devices that could trace the heredity in a simple drop of spilled blood, or hunt the truth to its hiding-place in faint fugitive alcoloids. Much more. Lenses that could photograph the mysterious substance that pervades animate matter and records it on chromolithic plates. Guinea-pigs, squeaking and breeding in long cages—what had they contributed to Ledsky's *Experimental Heredity*?

So complete, so perfect, this workshop was that Mr. Guelpa had at first to brush away a slight feeling of envy. There was no place for envy in his admiration for this master of science.

And now as Professor Ledsky's outburst came to an end, he said:

"I could spend a lifetime here."

"At least I hope we shall spend many profitable hours here," the professor replied, his hollow face still flushed with enthusiasm, his deep eyes glowing, and the restless capable hands tormenting each other, "for I'll put off as much of my work as I can. I have to work like a dog. And now you know why—it is all for this, this," a swift gesture of his

long arms embraced the laboratory, "and I spare nothing. I give it my money and my sleep. And I've things to show you, Mr. Guelpa—"

Once more Mr. Guelpa found himself listening to the vehement declamations—the fiery clatter of talk about the new experiments in chemico-psychic life; and it seemed to him that Professor Ledsky was speaking out of an infinite loneliness—that urgent arrogant thought had been bottled up within him and must find a listener.

On the table a telephone buzzed lightly.

"Now what is that call?" Professor Ledsky asked abruptly. "I said I was not to be disturbed."

He took down the receiver and listened, frowning.

"No," he snapped out; again he listened and at last said: "Very well. I suppose I must. Have the car ready. And you are to go with me. Yes, at once."

He hung up the receiver and turned regretfully to his guest.

"I'm sorry," and his face showed his annoyance, "but I am called to town. I said I'd put off my work—that we'd have another day of it here together—but you see. I've a case I can't put off—you'll pardon me, will you not? I may be able to get back in time for dinner. I hope so."

"Do not trouble yourself about it, Professor, you shall be quite well off, with myself and the ladies," Mr. Guelpa replied politely. "And some other day—"

"You will forgive me if I go at once. Pray look about as much as you please. Make yourself perfectly at home, and lock the door of the laboratory when you go out."

Professor Ledsky hurried away.

Left alone Mr. Guelpa strolled to and fro, apparently without much interest in the wonders of the laboratory. He picked up his little round black hat and brushed off the invisible dust and polished the crown. He was not far from the door, which had been left ajar, when he heard the noise of the motor. He saw Professor Ledsky enter the car. Then Cumber—a slow-moving Cumber dressed in black—got in beside him and the machine moved on.

For quite a while Mr. Guelpa stood, nursing his little hat, his eyes fixed on the road down which the motor-car was sweeping. At last he went out and, locking the door behind him, made his way across the garden to the old stone house. There he found domestic hubbub. Amanda and Alva Spiller were taking rugs out of the living-room, disclosing a good dancing floor, and Mrs. Ledsky hovered about like a butterfly that had turned working-bee. Above stairs in her room Mrs. Guelpa was lowering over a gown, which seemed fit for the occasion. Julie came with sand colored stockings dangling from her hands, saying in a tone of deep dejection: "Mother, look at that ladder. Now what dress shall I wear?"

He did not pause at his own room.

Slowly but lightly he mounted the boxed-in stairway that led to the floor above. He turned the knob of Cumber's door and pushed gently. A locked door. The only burglar's tool Mr. Guelpa carried was a glove-hook. It was a part of an absurd pen-knife Mrs. Guelpa had given him in one of her dark fits of domestic approbation. He had never known what to do with it. Now he looked at the button-hook with twinkling friendliness. He slipped it into the key-hole. It turned there with bland ineffectiveness. Mr. Guelpa withdrew it. Fortunately the steel was soft. It bent. He deftly fashioned it into a more useful instrument and in a little while the lock jerked back.

Very quietly the burglar opened the door, glanced around and entered Cumber's room. He stood there, his overcoat over his arm, his little cane a-dangle; his eyes went slowly round the room. It had been put in order for the day; it was ready for work or for sleep—there was the neatly made bed and the chair drawn up to the work-table. It was a room that told Mr. Guelpa nothing he did not know, but, standing there motionless, he let it photograph itself on the sensitive plates of retina and mind. Then he went swiftly to the closet. The worn gray coat was there, a-swing from a hook. He took it down and folded it up inside his overcoat.

"*Tiens!* I think my work here is done," he told himself.

He was certain this was the coat that had left its traces on the mantelpiece in the bedroom of Mrs. Benton, yonder in the house in New York; but his certitude was mental; the truth, infallible and material, would be established by a comparison of the cloth and the cast he had made of the imprints. He had all he needed, he decided, and his work there was done—his work of burglary and theft. He gave one farewell glance round. And then—he knew not why—he halted suddenly on his way to the door. It was as though some one had tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"Tiens! tiens!"

The little man wheeled toward the bookshelves.

It must be there—this obscure thing he had seen and not regarded—the unknown thing that tugged at his attention, and seemed to be whispering to his subconscious mind: "Here I am, Mr. Guelpa, here!"

Books, books, books—he did not disturb any of them. He merely stood and looked, letting his eyes rove over the various shelves. It was those books that pulled him mysteriously; he looked up adjusting his eye-glasses to read the titles. One book in particular caught his attention. It was a *General History, Vol. ii*—one of those works without pedigree, fit merely to pad a library shelf. And yet it seemed to have a strange attraction for him.

The mere fact that it attracted him, in an obscure way, meant something. Very carefully, touching only the top corner, Mr. Guelpa took down the

volume and turned back the cover. There was no name on the blank inside cover, no writing, none on the blank page opposite. Mr. Guelpa replaced it on the shelf, and for a little while he stood frowning at it. A commonplace book that might well be found anywhere. A second-hand book or third-hand. It meant nothing; and yet always in some persistent way it caught at Mr. Guelpa's attention—clung to it, would not let it go. He took it down again and ran his hand back of the shelf. Nothing. And yet Mr. Guelpa knew that some vague, half buried part of his mind was trying to make itself heard. He replaced the book carefully.

Well, at all events he had the coat!

He laughed in his soft chuckling way.

Burglary! And the loot!

He slipped on the old gray coat over his own smart morning coat; it hung loose and long on his slim body, but his overcoat was ample and it fitted over it and when buttoned up hid it entirely. With a new chuckle of satisfaction he cocked his little round hat at the proper angle and took up his walking-stick and gloves. He went out, leaving the door unlocked for his button-hook was ineffectual. And at best he was a poor burglar.

Soft of foot he slipped down to the floor below. He could hear his wife and her daughter having words of excitement—Julie's voice pitched to a tone of surprising gaiety. Without pausing he descended to the living-room, correct, amiable, holding no

the little hat in his hand. He found a flushed and busy hostess, still occupied with the household turmoil that precedes an impromptu dance.

He thanked her for the pleasure she was giving Julie; and Mrs. Guelpa and himself. She was very good, too good to them—

"I couldn't be," Mrs. Ledsky replied gaily, "and your daughter is a darling."

"You have done something to her, Mrs. Ledsky."

"Perhaps," she assented with her mystifying smile. "And you, Mr. Guelpa, do you promise me a dance? Come!"

She challenged him prettily.

"Ah, my dear, you honor me—but science does not dance," he declared.

Too well she knew it; there was not much gaiety in being the wife of science—a science that did not laugh or jazz, or talk humanly.

She had thought Mr. Guelpa was different. The kindly wrinkled face, the youthfulness that clung to his dyed mustache. He seemed to read her thought.

"I have not been so flattered for years," he said, "and after all I may hold you to it. Why not?"

"Are you going for a walk?" she inquired.

"Yes—a long walk. And then I shall be working in the laboratory. So do not give yourself any concern about me. I have the key. I shall be all right."

They were both smiling when he took his departure.

He left by the front door. The gates of the drive were closed. But in any case that was not the way he had in mind. Twirling his cane he sauntered on toward the laboratory. The key was in his hand but he did not thrust it into the lock. The laboratory door where he stood could not be seen from the house, or from the gates. He waited, in seeming indecision. Suddenly he slipped round the corner to the blind-side of the building. There was a narrow path between it and the thick hedge that fenced in the estate. It was broad and deep, but at one point its solidity was only apparent. Light showed through the frozen bushes indicating a possible way out, for agility packed into a small body. Putting the key to the laboratory in his pocket, fastening the last button of his neat gloves, touching up his mustache, he smiled at the space in the hedge as though it were already an old acquaintance.

Then he bent back the branches.

They cracked faintly, and snapped. He stood quite still; one minute, two minutes; nothing happened.

Then deftly he slipped through the hedge.

Before he could straighten up—before he had more than a glimpse of the frozen road—a big hand clamped down on his shoulder and another gripped his waist jerking him round.

"Tiens! tiens! What the—"

But the little man's protest got no further.

"Ring off! Cut out the cackle! In you go!"

With one yank of the big hands Mr. Guelpa was thrown breathless into an automobile, and his captor crowding against him, was swiftly whirled away down the frozen road.

His career as a scientific burglar, from beginning to end, had lasted less than fifty minutes.

CHAPTER XI

THE MOUSE TRAP

MISS GLENN did not like New York. It was Hard Luck Town. She had gone to earth in a dingy lodging-house, and day by day was eating the rings off her fingers. And no Pete. And no George. She had worn her high heels crooked in her search for them. She loved Pete with all the undying love of Hollywood, but in this emergency her thoughts turned oftenest to George Ringgold. He had a good heart and in the old days had been serious. A bit slow, but you can trust that kind.

To-day as she tried the cards on the dingy bed-cover of her little room in the lodging-house, before setting out on her rather thrilling occupation in life—which was either to hunt a man or run from him like mad—the blessed king of clubs turned up with a “meeting” and a “prosperous journey.” Glory be! George was clubs.

“At last!”

She had perfect confidence in the cards, though she had to admit that now and then she “misinterpreted” them—but that was her fault. To-day there could be no mistake. It was a pity she had

wasted so much of this lucky day; but she had slept late, and then it had taken hours to make the cards come out right and decree the "meeting" and the prosperous journey. Fortunately, she was already dressed—except her face. When her eyes were smudged and her lips and cheeks made presentable, she set out.

A dozen times she had paraded that block in Ninth Street, where she had seen George Ringgold whisked away in an automobile, and always in vain. She could not identify the house. Perhaps to-day it would be different; it must be, for never did the paste-board sybils lie; and it was.

It was.

A pleasant-looking young man smoking a cigar lounged up to her. He took the cigar out of his mouth and tipped his hat.

"Like this street, don't you?" he remarked easily, "or are you looking for some one?"

"On your way!" Miss Glenn retorted curtly.

"Now don't go up. It's just that I happened to see you about here, looking as though you'd lost something."

"My choice remark to you is—beat it."

"But suppose I can help you find it?"

Miss Glenn gave the young man the muddy look she always had in readiness for the aggressive male, and repeated her blunt advice.

"Not quite yet. You interest me strangely—and not in the way you think. Got that? You're

the sweet young thing that did your act the other day in front of this house, when a taxi drove off—and you went speeding after it. Got that? I've been thinking about it. I'm here to think. Now come across. What were you howling after those friends of mine for?"

Kittie's anti-male manner had sloughed off her like a coat. Her eyes opened wide with eagerness.

"Your friends!"

She grabbed the young man's arm.

"You know George Ringgold!" she cried.

"Now you've got me, I see. Sure I do. He's the man I'm working for. Mr. George Ringgold. So that's what you're after. Why? Spill the rest."

"I've got to see him!"

"Why?"

Miss Glenn drew on her reserve fund of dignity.

"If he's your boss," she said, "I think you had better ask him. And now, please, give me his address."

"I'll do better than that. I'll take you to him. Just wait a minute. There's a friend of mine about here and I'll wise him up that I'm off. I'll be playing the cards at that."

The one word that really bit into Kittie's understanding was the word cards. Oh, they never lied. "The king of clubs, a meeting, a prosperous journey"—a feeling of almost religious gratitude welled up in her heart. She was dazed, like some poor orthodox soul who has always believed in miracles

and suddenly—in stark amazement—sees one really happen. She scarcely noticed the pleasant-looking young man slip across the street and have word with another man, probably equally young and pleasant. She was praying, praying to her paste-board gods. By the time he returned she was once more Miss Kittie Glenn.

“And now we’ll beat it,” he said, “as fast as a taxi can make it.”

“You’ve got your lines wrong,” she remarked haughtily; perhaps this man really was one of George’s employees, but this taxi business had an old familiar air to it; so she added:

“When you said taxi you meant street-car.”

After all, they went by the underground, and Kittie was hauled through the mysterious intestines of the great city and ejected into the very building that housed the offices of the Great Orient. Her confidence in her companion rose; he seemed to know his way about. He bore her on past office boys and clerks. At last the door of a private office opened.

Kittie entered alone and found herself, with a thumping heart, face to face with George Ringgold. But with a totally new George. A George ringed round with office dignity, a darkling stenographer guarding the inner portal of his stronghold. An impressive George. She scarcely recognized in him the diffident George who had told her she was “not like other girls”—in the old days there out west.

She checked her impulsive rush toward him, and it was he who came forward to greet her.

"Kittie," he exclaimed, "when your name was brought in I hardly thought it possible. And how are you, Kittie? Take this chair."

It was not what she had expected, for she remembered that long ago good-by, when he had said he would never forget; nor was it quite what he had expected. He looked at her through his spectacles and tried to remember that evening in Hollywood when she had given him a kind, soothing little kiss and sent him away with the word "No" ringing in his ears and despair tugging at his heart.

"Are you glad to see me, George?"

"Yes, Kittie."

She looked as though she had been going through dire days. Her eyes were tired, her face was drawn. She was pathetic and a pathetic Kittie was new to him; and appealing. After all she had once been the biggest thing in his humdrum life—before the Great Orient Insurance Company had absorbed him and his desires and ambitions.

"What's the matter, Kittie? What's happened?"

"Everything," she replied, and then to her amazement the bluff she faced the world with so cheekily failed her and she found herself weeping, though she knew her face wouldn't stand for that. She dabbed her eyes with a little wad of a handkerchief. And then her story gushed out of her,

incoherent, extraordinary. She told him about Pete and their engagement, of his letters and the "big thing" he was pulling off. And listening to her, George Ringgold experienced a queer jumble of emotions in his usually well-behaved mind. He perceived that there had reawakened in him the old hungry tenderness for this troubled Kittie with the dabbled face and the tired eyes; and that he was rapidly acquiring a robust hatred for this Peter person—every time she spoke his name he experienced a heaving sense of nausea. And above all was a rising desire to help her out. He wanted to see her eyes dance and hear once more her quaint up-and-down laughter. Withal he felt rather humiliated that these unbusinesslike emotions should have invaded his dignified throne-room of the Great Orient.

"Of course you must find him," he said gravely, "let me see that telegram."

She thrust it into his hand. He read it carefully and for quite a little while he held his silence. A thoughtful silence.

"Evidently misaddressed," he decided at last, "but it will not be difficult to straighten this out. There will be no trouble. Make your mind easy, Kittie. I shall find Mr. Peter Barling, if he is to be found."

He reassured her.

And then his desk-telephone buzzed softly. He spoke into it a "yes," and "yes, sir," and "at once."

"Will you wait here a few moments, Kittie? Now don't cry any more, please. Remember this is a business office. I'll be back soon."

Mr. Ringgold had been summoned to Mr. Steeger's office.

The old lawyer, round and sound, smoking lazily his thick cigar, was in his easy chair. Near by sat Mr. Faynis, studying through half-closed eyes the smiling Japanese boy, Nakki, who stood hat in hand in front of him.

"Thought you might like to hear this, Mr. Ringgold. Some of our people just brought this bright gentleman in. They picked him up as he was leaving the Benton house in Ninth Street. Take a chair."

Nakki waited with bland equanimity, at his foot was his little suit-case. Under his arm was an inevitable book.

"You may sit down."

Before seating himself the little Jap bowed gravely, and waited.

"Your name is Nakki?" Faynis began. "You were in the employ of Mr. and Mrs. Benton, were you not?"

"Yes, sir," Nakki replied. "Six months. And now," he volunteered, "I am discharge by this letter with bill for my payment of salary. Want to see it, sir?"

Without waiting for a reply he took a letter from his pocket, and with another bow handed it

to Faynis; whereupon he reseated himself and waited.

Faynis ran his eyes over the letter and then read it aloud:

"Dear Nakki:

"I shall not be able to return home for some time as my health is very bad and my family wishes me to remain with them. I send you the money I owe you and two months' extra wages instead of the notice. I hope you will pass your examinations and be very successful in life. Please leave the key of the house with the landlord next door.

"With best wishes

"Bertha Benton."

"Did this letter come through the mail?"

"No, sir. It was left in the letter-box, where I discovered it."

"There was a check?"

"No, sir, in bills of American money."

"You liked Mr. Benton, Nakki?"

"Mr. Benton was very fine man. Yes, I liked him very much before he was dead."

"Did he talk to you now and then?"

"No, not much. Mr. Benton very dignified man. He said: 'Hell, Nakki, you're a good little guy,' and he gave me two dollars. And another time five. That was our conversation."

"What did he give you that money for, Nakki?"

"The first time it was because he was very fine

man. The second time? It was for the telegram," he explained patiently.

"What telegram?"

"To a lady," and fathomless guile and masculine complicity were in Nakki's grin, as he added, "Mr. Benton was married man. So he ask me to send it, on the strict confidential. He was in feeble illness that day. So he told me what to write and I wrote it and sent it away. Q. T. Five dollars."

"To what lady? Where?"

George Ringgold rose from his chair, and then with a hurried apology resumed his business decorum.

"Pardon me, Mr. Faynis, may I ask a question?"

When he left Kittie in his office he had mechanically carried the telegram with him.

"How was that telegram of yours signed?" he questioned the Jap boy.

"Oh, me. I wrote it all."

"Yes, but what name did he tell you to sign?"

"It was to a lady, but now Mr. Benton is dead. That time he tell me to sign his name 'Pete.'"

"There is the telegram, Mr. Faynis," Mr. Ringgold said; he had played his little part, decorously, calmly, as an official of a great organization should play it; but inside he was rocking with human emotions—Kittie in the room near by—and Pete was dead—and Pete was Benton—and Benton was dead—

He was surprised that the lawyers were as unexcited as the Jap himself.

"H'm," Steeger murmured, taking the yellow paper in his hand, "to Miss Kittie Glenn in Hollywood. Return address evidently wrong. Not that of the Benton house. Made a little mistake there, Nakki."

"Yes, sir, I was in great speed. Perhaps they not read my writing clear," Nakki confessed.

"Mr. Steeger, I just received that telegram from the young lady to whom it was sent. She came in answer to it. Naturally she could find neither the house nor the man who signed himself 'Pete.' So she looked me up. I knew her when I was in Los Angeles. She is here now. She knew the man Benton as Peter Barling. She was engaged to marry him. And she does not know he is dead."

Ringgold paused. He was quite steady and matter of fact.

"Shall I tell her, or would you like to see her—here?" he asked.

"Here, I think, Mr. Ringgold. You might prepare her perhaps—what do you think, Faynis?"

Faynis acquiesced.

While Ringgold went on his disturbing errand, the lawyers finished with Nakki, ascertained where they could find him in case they needed him and sent him away—"one of our people" following obscurely in order to make sure the little Jap had given the right address.

It was a bewildered Kittie whom Ringgold finally showed into the room where the lawyers sat. She had been told that Peter Barling, her Pete, was dead. George had told it very gently. He had said little else, for he knew the questioning she would have to go through. Why should she have to suffer it all twice over? And the statement that her Pete was dead had dazed the girl. What mind she had was absorbed in the awful revelation. Her Pete! He was dead. And what was to become of her? And that fleeting vision of a fortune! The "big thing" he was to pull off—to be shared with her. He was dead.

So she sank into a chair, too shocked to be more than dimly aware of Faynis and the white-haired old man by the big desk. George was with her; that fact finally got into her mind—it steadied her.

"Can it be true Mr. Barling is dead?" she inquired quiveringly; even under the paint her face showed white, "he must have been dying when he sent for me. That's what it meant."

"I'm afraid it's true, Miss Glenn, but you are going to bear up."

"Yes," she whispered.

"Could you answer a few questions?" Faynis was kind and sympathetic. "Thank you. How long ago did Mr. Barling come east?"

"More than a year ago. He had a big deal on. He didn't tell me, but I suppose it was the races—that's what he was. In the last letter I got from

him Pete said it was soon coming off. He'd have a wad of money he wrote and it would be the wedding march for us. Then his telegram came and I went broke getting here—and he wasn't to be found."

Kittie seemed to be thinking aloud rather than trying to tell her poor little story of love for the bragging Barling with his schemes of wealth and his red, physical, brute-magnetism that had fascinated her. She concluded quite simply: "George, Pete is dead?"

"Yes, Kittie," replied Ringgold gently, "he is dead."

Then as though caught by a sudden memory she cried:

"I don't believe it. Why, in his very last letter he told me not to believe any lies I heard about him—even if I heard he was dead. He said he was playing a big game, *but he didn't have to die to win.*"

This outburst went without comment from the three men, who watched her attentively, exchanging significant glances. The silence was broken by Faynis:

"Miss Glenn, did you know that Mr. Barling was living in New York under another name?"

"Pete? No. He'd have told me, wouldn't he?"

"Under the name of Richard Benton," Faynis persisted kindly, "and that it was under the name of Richard Benton that he was married here over a

year ago—shortly after the time he left you in Hollywood.”

“You mean he threw me down for another woman! Pete! Married! George, is that true?”

“There is no doubt of it, now,” Faynis continued. “He was legally married under that name, Benton. The records prove it. He took out a life-insurance policy at the time of his marriage under that name. And as Benton he died.”

“If he had a wife why did he send for me!” she exclaimed, then under her emotion her native shrewdness caught at the phrase “insurance policy.”

“That’s why he telegraphed for me. It was the insurance money. He knew what a rotten trick he had played me and wanted to square himself, so he took out that policy in my name!”

“You are mistaken, Miss Glenn, I am sorry to say,” Faynis explained. “He must have had quite another motive in sending for you, because that policy is payable to his legal wife, known as Mrs. Benton. He left nothing for you.”

Too many things had been poured upon poor little Kittie; she was lost in a maze of revelations, jealousies, griefs, angers. The only thing that seemed real was George. It may be Faynis perceived that she was at the breaking point; he suggested that Ringgold should take her into his office and explain things quietly to her. She found it hard to keep her feet as she went with George, and once again the tears began to trickle.

"What do you think of it, Steeger?" inquired Faynis, now that they were alone.

"Help yourself to a cigar. I'm damned if that young Ringgold hasn't got something human inside him. He was sorry for that girl. I thought he was a fountain-pen with nothing inside but a gold nib and ink. That a good cigar?"

"As I'm smoking my own," replied Faynis, "it is. What's your opinion of this new turn? We seem to be getting somewhere."

"The girl? The two names? Evidently the corpse was a crook. That's plain enough. He was in the swindle, but he evidently didn't know as much about it as he thought he did. You see, after all, he did have to die to win."

"Yes, Steeger, but that might have been an accident. Suppose they intended to substitute a corpse for this Barling or Benton who played the part—and the fellow was merely doped into illness, and they carried the thing too far. Evidently he thought he was sure of getting out and sharing the loot. It might be. And it might be the overdose was an accident. But I don't see it that way. Why should they run such a desperate risk as trying to smuggle a corpse into that coffin, when all they had to do was to use the man they had? No, I think Benton was elected to be the corpse all right. Of course he didn't suspect it. They jollied him along in some way and then when they were ready his sweet little wife slipped him the final dose—and

there was a perfectly good corpse for you to pay insurance on."

"You may be right, Faynis. It looks it."

"There is no doubt that the principals in the Los Angeles swindle are the identical same crooks who tried to operate this one."

"I think they took a desperate chance when they used the same woman," remarked Faynis.

"Why not?" Steeger asked. "Years had gone by and the other affair took place far enough away—on the other rim of the continent. Why break in a new woman? This one was already in the game. It was a mere coincidence that Ringgold should have been the claim clerk out there, should have come on here and recognized her."

"Well we'll get her," said Faynis confidently. "You remember Mr. Guelpa?"

"I would."

"Well, he's out at Ledsky's. You know she was traced to that house. Of course a man like Ledsky has all sorts of queer patients—and then there are the servants who may be implicated in trying to hide the woman. If Mrs. Benton really went there she must have had some purpose—"

"We've got that house watched, Faynis. We've had two good men off and on. Now, Tim Lear, the best of the lot is up there himself. Ledsky was rather put out about it naturally, and he carried off Mr. Guelpa and his entire family to try to solve the mystery."

Mr. Steeger was a friend to physical idleness. He settled back in his comfortable chair and began to discuss Mr. Guelpa with Faynis when his secretary appeared.

"It's Mr. Lear, sir, he desired me to tell you he has just motored in from the country and wishes to see you."

"Let him come in."

"He's not alone, Mr. Steeger. He told me to say—it's very important—he thinks he's got your man."

"Gad! Faynis, what did I tell you? Tim Lear is the best of the lot. Bring 'em in. Bring 'em in!"

"An arrest?" Faynis exclaimed.

"So it seems."

"Yes, and the prisoner is here," said a quiet voice from the doorway, and bowing, smiling—his little black hat in his hand—Mr. Guelpa entered the room, closing the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHADOW

FAYNIS jumped to his feet.
"You! Mr. Guelpa!"

"Yes," and the little man went chuckling to a chair, "I am the distinguished prisoner. I was very competently arrested."

"What have these confounded fools of yours been doing, Steeger?"

"Their duty," replied Mr. Guelpa, "only their duty, but a trifle roughly."

He looked sorrowfully at his hat which had suffered when big Tim Lear fell upon him.

Steeger was rolling about in his chair, enjoying himself, but he said gravely: "They shall apologize."

"Indeed, no, Mr. Steeger. They did me a great service," Mr. Guelpa continued, looking at the fat man. "You see, I had no automobile. Professor Ledsky and his assistant had motored in with his car. I do not know that charming country very well. What was I to do? I wished to see you at once. How? Well, your detectives were there, I discovered—they smoke strong tobacco, especially

the vigilant man who was watching a thin place in the hedge. I was sure he would bring me to your office, Mr. Steeger, and I thought he must have a motor-car near by—that would save time. So I stepped through the hedge into his competent hands. I preferred to make no explanations—indeed I was not given a chance—so here I am.”

Faynis laughed.

“And none the worse for it, I hope?”

“My hat—ah, well—the point is that I am here and no one knows it. That was important.”

Steeger turned serious.

“I am certain of that, Mr. Guelpa,” he said.

“You must pardon me for the way I took it. I was smiling at your queer method of getting a free ride to town. We are deeply indebted to you. Please tell us what you have found?”

“The box I left here, Mr. Steeger, I may have it, please?”

It was taken from a locked drawer and given to him.

“Thank you. It is the cast I made of the traces imprinted on the mantelpiece of Mrs. Benton's room. A dust-record. It is quite plain, you see. And here—”

Mr. Guelpa stood up and removed his overcoat, displaying his slim figure wrapped in a dingy gray coat that flapped about him.

“*Ouf!*” he exclaimed, as he laid it on the table, “I am glad to be out of it. It smells of another man.”

He dusted himself with his gloves and twitched up his puffy scarf.

"*Ouf!*" he repeated, "it is not delicate, eh? No. It is the crime-coat. You see?"

"You mean it is the coat that left the traces recorded on that cast?" Steeger asked in amazement.

"Yes. That is the identical coat. I have other proof—a fragment of the texture. And plenty more. But this will suffice."

"We'll take your word for that, Mr. Guelpa, of course."

"And this coat belongs—or did belong to Mr. Cumber, who is the assistant of Professor Ledsky. Now it is mine. I stole it, eh? from his room in the house. From his clothes-closet."

He smiled at the fat lawyer and then at the lean one, and went on:

"Now I have more than one thing to say. You will listen?"

Mr. Guelpa told his story with that perfect amplitude of detail which left no room for inexactitude. The outstanding statements were these:

His famous confrère, Professor Ledsky, had already invited him and his family to his country-place, when came the news that Mrs. Benton had been traced to that very house. Mr. Guelpa had not quite decided to make this visit, but after this astounding disclosure the professor had virtually insisted upon his acceptance, not merely as a guest but as an investigator. And Mrs. Ledsky had been

equally urgent in her invitation to his wife. So he had gone.

"Now what did I already know?" Mr. Guelpa asked, glancing from one lawyer to the other, with bright alert eyes.

He had learned something from the inspection of the Narrow House—the house of death. He had found a book of verse, belonging to Mrs. Benton—a new book, which had admirably recorded her finger-tips and thumbs and of these he had already made a porosopic record—infallible as a means of identification. He had hair-combings: they, too, would make certain the identity of the woman from whose head they had come; and more.

Then the imprints in the dust of the mantelpiece: Mr. Guelpa pictured for them the type of man he had visualized lounging there—a slumbrous, hulking man not tall; and showed them again the fragment of tweed he had found on the splintered shelf. Clues to a woman—her hair and hands and feet. Clues to a man—his preferred posture and attitude, his coat.

The woman?

The man?

Mr. Guelpa explained how he had carried with him an image of that man, lounging darkly over the couch where Mrs. Benton lay. And, then, he had come to Professor Ledsky's house, and against the doorway, his secretary—Cumber—stood, loungingly, leaning on his elbow. A suggestion, an im-

pression, nothing more. Accompanied by Professor Ledsky, who was equally keen on the investigation he had inspected every nook and corner of the house. In Cumber's closet he had seen an old coat much the color seemingly of the few threads he had found on the mantel. Suspicion? Yes, but not certitude. And certitude was needed before he could speak to Professor Ledsky about this thing which struck so hard at his assistant—Ledsky's *protégé* whom he trusted and, in his queer way, loved.

"To-day Professor Ledsky happened to be called to the city for an important consultation. Cumber drove him in to town," Mr. Guelpa went on, "and there was an opportunity to make sure, at least, of one thing: the coat. I got possession of it by the oldest and simplest method in the world—I stole it."

Mr. Guelpa nodded blandly.

"Forcible entry and theft. And it led to the very certain conclusion that Cumber was a visitor to the Benton house—that he was one of the criminal conspirators—it may be the leading one; it may be a mere agent."

"This evidence, Mr. Guelpa," Steeger said confidently, "is going to be of the very greatest importance to us, and in the name of our company I thank you. You have proved that Cumber frequented the Benton house during the period of Benton's illness and death. And while your discovery does not take us to a final conclusion it opens the way to it. You have one end of the thread and we

have another. Our reports are that Mrs. Benton certainly entered that house. Was it to see Cumber, her accomplice, and enlist his aid? Probably. For by that time she—or her associates—had certainly got some wind of our investigations. That seems right. Now, you say you are absolutely sure she is not in Professor Ledsky's house at the present time."

"Quite sure."

"Well, then, how did she get away? Your escape, Mr. Guelpa, was not successful because you did not want it to be. But before—that night when Mrs. Benton entered—the place was not watched as it is to-day. The watchers were not set. And with Cumber's aid she might have slipped out—even through that hole in the hedge that aided and abetted your flight, after you had committed burglary," and Steeger smiled. "Assume she got away. Won't we have to keep in touch with him? Communicate in some way? Yes. So our way to her is very likely going to be through this man Cumber. Thus you perceive what an immense gain your investigation is already to us."

"I can see one thing more," Mr. Guelpa put in, paying no heed to Steeger's praise of his efforts. Professor Ledsky thinks very highly of Cumber and Cumber seems to take full advantage of this good opinion—of affection, even. But Mrs. Ledsky dislikes and mistrusts him. She always has, she says. I think she reads the man intuitively far more

clearly than Professor Ledsky, with all his intelligence, does. He is like a man who has a dog; he is blind to all its faults. I have no doubt that Mrs. Ledsky thinks as we do, that Cumber was concerned with this mysterious visit of Mrs. Benton. At first her fear was the woman was some insane person, and naturally she is afraid of mad people. Well, so am I. Now she is nervous for another reason. She fears Cumber and his connection with the woman. Indeed she has asked us to stay on—she would like my step-daughter to remain with her, if we can not stay. It is a lonely place. Perhaps Julie will remain. If her mother consents.”

“And you, Mr. Guelpa?”

“No, no, that is impossible. I have too much to do. I must get back to town. But my step-daughter would enjoy herself. They are having a dance out there this afternoon. I, by the way, am supposed to be taking a walk or working hard in the laboratory. But I can not possibly extend my visit. I shall do what I can—for your sake, Mr. Faynis, and yours, sir—but I really must get on with the work I came to do here in New York. I shall remain in the city to-night, however, and perhaps to-morrow, in case you wish to consult with me. I shall be at my hotel, and I am wholly at your service, sir, and that of my friend, Mr. Faynis.” And Mr. Guelpa bowed and smiled.

Steeger got up; it was to choose a cigar from his box.

"How about the little girl, Faynis? You see," he went on, turning toward Mr. Guelpa, "we too have not been idle, as the young folks say. Any-way Ringgold has not been idle. And he has turned up a trump. A bright little card."

"Yes, Mr. Guelpa, I was about to tell you the latest developments of the Benton case," remarked Faynis, "first the little Japanese boy, Nakki and then Miss Kittie Glenn."

"Tiens! tiens!"

"We have just found out a good deal about Richard Benton, alias Peter Barling."

"Tiens! tiens! tiens!"

Concisely enough Faynis related how Miss Kittie Glenn had come into the case. First her acquaintance with George Ringgold while he was in Los Angeles; her engagement to one Peter Barling or Benton; then the telegram which Benton had sent her, through the Japanese boy, signed Pete—a telegram that had brought her to New York. All this had definitely established the fact that Benton and Barling were one and the same man.

"Definitely?" Mr. Guelpa asked quizzically, perhaps. But a good deal of it depends, does it not, upon the girl. May I see her?"

"She is waiting in Mr. Ringgold's office," said Mr. Steeger, "I'll send for them. We didn't plumb her very deeply."

It was a tranquillized Miss Glenn who reentered. She had been leaning on George Ringgold's steady

kindliness, and she had absorbed strength and calm from it. Moreover she had found time to make up her pretty face again according to Hollywood standards of what is really proper for a nice young girl. Her lips were red once more, the rose paint ran evenly over her cheeks, and her luring eyes were daintily smudgy. And in addition to all this her keen practical common sense had taken her in hand. Tears were all very well in their place. What she had to think of now was herself and a meal-ticket. Pete had been a rotter; he had done her dirt. And already Miss Glenn had discovered that she had been a victim not of love, but fascination. Like Mary Ann.

"It was just another of those damn infatuations," she had told herself.

Not love, but the thing that masquerades as love for a poor girl and is always tripping her up. Professor Ledsky, had he been there to study her psychic process, would have informed her that what masquerades as love is merely a manifestation of the nerves at the base of the spine; and getting over it breaks no hearts. In her own intuitive way Kittie knew as much as science knows. Well; Pete had certainly done her dirt, Miss Glenn decided, and she was going to take care of herself. George had gone on tremendously in the world—in his office he looked like something on a throne.

Therefore comforted and keen of wit, looking for ways to assist George in this dark case of his

which she seemed to herself to be vastly important, she faced Mr. Guelpa. She sat up straight, with hands on the red vanity case in her lap, her feet on the floor and well apart—which is, for a woman, a declaration that she is ready to tell the truth and hide nothing.

Mr. Guelpa praised her, a little smile of elderly admiration playing amid his wrinkles and lifting his purple-dyed mustache.

"You have helped us very much," he began. "It is extraordinary how you have worked this out—what valuable information you have given us. Extremely valuable."

Kittie decided that what was valuable must be worth money; she began to be fond of the smiling little man.

The facts he had obtained from the lawyers he brought to her now in a picturesque way that thrilled her like a moving-picture in which she might be watching herself battle with infamy and mysterious crime—she would be in white with real glycerine tears welling from her eyes.

"It was your telegram that proved Peter Barling and Richard Benton were one—the same man. A man of an evil past. He had deceived and abandoned you to marry another woman. A sad bad thing, Miss Glenn."

Kittie saw it was tragic.

"And the letter you mentioned. May I read it?"

Kittie took Pete's last letter from her vanity case and handed it to Mr. Guelpa, who read it carefully.

"Yes, the letter shows he was deep in some swindle. What? to swindle this company.

"But ah, Miss Glenn! When he wrote he did not have to die to win, he revealed the fact—can you see it now?—that a dead man was to be put in his place and quickly cremated? That would cover up the substitution."

"My Gawd!" Kittie exclaimed dramatically, this was drama indeed. Her heart began to pound.

"Now, why did he send for you? He was married and insured in favor of his wife. Shall I tell you why he telegraphed for you to come? Suddenly he had realized he would have to die—and lose; that his accomplices were playing him false. Of course he could expect no help from them. He was in their power. And so he wired you in a last desperate chance that you could save him. He meant to reveal the plot to you, in order that you might stand between him and the men who were doing him to death in order to obtain his share of the insurance money. That share he was determined to blackmail them into giving you. If they refused, you could betray them. And then there was the other motive. He might cheat them after all and live if you came and got him away from them and their deadly drugs. He could

trust you. He could not trust his wife. What do you think?"

Kittie was beyond thinking.

"That is the way I explain the telegram," Mr. Guelpa went on.

"A nice woman to throw me down for," said Kittie bitterly.

"Yes, that woman was in the swindle with him, may be, or the other man or men—for there must have been other men—who decided that he should be the corpse. It would have been a very dangerous—if not impossible—thing to have obtained a real corpse. Barling of a sudden realized this. He knew it."

Mr. Guelpa was close to her, his eyes blinking at her dazed face; and his voice sank to the note of horror.

So he sent you that desperate appeal—secretly—to come and help him—too late. He died. Miss Glenn, the terrible wrong that man did you—his deception and desertion—has been avenged! Had you arrived in time he might have confessed all—betrayed his associates—and so lived, though in a felon's cell. It was not to be. His punishment was death."

Kittie saw herself that way—a victim; caught up in a terrible drama of betrayal and murder and vengeance. She dabbed at her eyes with a wad of handkerchief. And Pete—her Pete—the villain! It was terrifying and real. Pete the villain of it?

"I know he did me dirt—I mean an injury," she corrected herself. "But he did not look like that."

"Like what?" Mr. Guelpa asked quickly.

"Like the villain. See—"

From the red vanity she took out a snap-shot photograph and held it out to Mr. Guelpa.

"It is a picture of him. He sent it to me some months ago," she explained, "and the lady with him. That's his sister."

Mr. Guelpa studied the picture for a while and then, without a word, handed it to Steeger.

"Do you recognize the man?"

"Certainly. It's Benton. I saw him here at the time the policy was approved."

"And you, Mr. Ringgold?"

"That woman, Mr. Guelpa, was not his sister. She was his wife. It is Mrs. Benton."

"No—his sister!" Kittie cried sharply. "Pete said it was!"

No one answered her protest.

"So that is Benton's photograph," Ringgold went on. "I was having my vacation when the policy was taken out, anyway I would not have seen him here, I dare say. But I have certainly met him somewhere. Yes, now I remember, it was in the office of the insurance company in Los Angeles. He was with Mrs. Forsythe, as she was known to us out there, when her husband, Forsythe, took out his insurance in that company. I recognize the man."

"He did not pose as her husband there?"

"No, no. He was nothing like him. But he went about with Mrs. Forsythe and I frequently saw them together."

"So that is Mrs. Benton," observed Mr. Guelpa, "the elusive Mrs. Benton. And the man is Benton. May I have the photograph again, please? And may I keep it for a day or two, Miss Glenn? Thank you. And now—gentlemen—I must withdraw. I must telephone my wife that I shall not return to Professor Ledsky's to-night."

"My car is outside, Mr. Guelpa," said Faynis, "tell the man to drive you to your hotel. Wait—I'll go down with you."

"Do not trouble, my friend. I know the car. I can find it. Thank you."

With this remark Mr. Guelpa shook hands all round, in the affable French way, beginning with Miss Glenn and ending with Mr. Ringgold. Then he took up his hat, stared at it reproachfully, and, bowing to every one, departed.

In the elevator he was very dignified and grave; he looked like some dainty little sexagenarian who was successfully keeping young and pondering deep affairs of business. Without much trouble he found the Faynis car on the side-street where it usually hung off and on for its master. The chauffeur knew him and opened the door. The car crept through the traffic making for a clear street and it was only when he had put himself at ease in the corner and lighted a cigarette, that Mr. Guelpa chuckled his eternal: "*Tiens! Tiens!*" It was his

way of permitting himself to announce (entirely to himself) that he was brimming with satisfaction. He took from his pocket the photograph of Benton and the woman and looked at it with triumphant eyes.

Yes, it was there.

It was there.

The *shadow!*

He remembered when he first alighted at the door of Professor Ledsky's house something had printed itself upon his infallible memory. It was an old, old tree, with one gaunt and crooked limb thrust out as though pointing to the door of the house, and announcing:

"Yes, here it is."

And across the photograph he held in his hand—this picture of Benton and his wife—there *fell the shadow of the crooked branch.*

The house was not in the snap-shot. But there the shadow lay, pointing to an invisible door, as though to say:

"Yes, it is just over there—there's the door of the house."

"*Tiens! Tiens!*" murmured Mr. Guelpa, "so the two of them—the dead man and his wife were photographed on the lawn of Ledsky's country house. And some one in that house took the photograph."

"Who?"

The answer was obvious. It must have been taken by the professor's assistant: that man Cumber,

CHAPTER XIII

EVE IN THE GARDEN

THE impromptu dance Mrs. Ledsky got up for Julie was quite a success. She had rallied a goodly lot of boys and girls, with casual matrons who sharpened their French on Mrs. Guelpa, when they were not stealing their daughters' dancing-partners. The presence of the half-dozen representatives of the last generation, as well as the fact that Professor Ledsky's wine-cellar was under lock and key, led to decorum and did not banish gaiety.

Marian Netley alone was enough to set off the fire-works. She was a blithe and precocious child, born with a desire to upset the equanimity of things.

She fastened on Paul Dupuis who had come with the Emorys.

A tall youth was Paul, slim and solemn, with defensive eyes and a lot of light brown hair heaved back over his head and falling on his neck. He was very dignified, impressively polite in his French way—which was the way of the scion of the old French Protestant family, dating back to Coligny. Of late his family had become more interested in finance than religious warfare, and Paul's father

was the great Parisian banker—a cold lean man, quite as dignified as Paul himself. To his horror he had one day discovered that Paul was more interested in his soul than in Protestant banking. Paul had developed high ideals. He aspired. He put himself on a diet of cold boiled rice in order to give his soul a fair chance. And he let his hair grow. This was the youth the banker had sent to New York to forget all that sort of thing and learn something of the banker's art and craft in the bank of Monsieur Dupius' New York correspondent. As Paul's mother had been an American—one of the Greens of Philadelphia—he spoke English well enough, though he was readier in French.

He had little small-talk; he was too busy with his own important thoughts about the universe which revolved round him and was, even to him, fairly mysterious. On this subject he could let himself go. If he were alone he put it in prose or verse. To a sympathetic listener he poured it out in darkling eloquence. That is what had happened on the ship.

He had told Julie all about the problems that lay about them both—he had told her of his soul—

And Julie, pacing the deck at the side of this tall boy, with the hair, had listened, listened—this torrent of youthful egoism sounded to her like love. Perhaps it was, but Julie, like a loyal step-daughter, knew more of criminology than she did of love. Anyway Paul's soul rolled over her and submerged

her. She used to dream of him, of course—which must have been very much like dreaming of a phonograph—and he was the first man she had ever dreamed of in her safe eighteen years.

Marian, in blue rags, dragged her up to him. "Here's Merely Me again. And of course you know Paul. Here he is."

Mary Ann was dragging at his arm, which spoiled his Parisian bow and prevented him from kissing Julie's hand, but his soulful eyes looked full in her eyes and for both of them it was a moment of sudden communion—and confession.

And Mary Ann clung.

It was fortunate for them that Mrs. Ledsky was a hostess of infinite wisdom and tact. She deftly got the squealing Mary Ann enclosed in the arms of a boy who could really dance.

Paul and Julie were alone.

They found a place on the settle in the hall. And Paul spoke gravely:

"Miss Julie, I am not betrothed."

"Oh!" murmured Julie softly.

"I have found much to study in this country," he went on, "youth is very unreflective here. When Miss Marian told me she was engaged to me, I was extremely perturbed. I thought of my parents—and of myself. But I have never yet been in a situation where my reason failed to find a solution—a way out. With honor."

"But, Monsieur Dupuis—her parents—"

"I questioned her father. He was so agitated that he laughed from pure hysteria. Then I spoke to her mother. She was very kind. She said there was nothing to it—whatsoever. That Marian was merely 'rushing me—' "

"What does that mean?"

"She had gone crazy about me. She herself confessed it, poor girl. It seems to be a way American girls have. So she rushed me. But her mother assured me it would not last, and that the child—she is only a child and I think of her as still a child—would not be heartbroken if this mad dream of hers soon came to an end and would not be rewarded by marriage. I thanked God for that, for I would not act dishonorably even if I were to be made unhappy forever. At one time I feared that in her despair she might kill herself—she said she was just dying for me. I could not have such a sin on my soul. Thank Heaven, Miss Julie, it is just an American way—it is some sort of girlish game—'rushing a man' and, though I can not approve of it, it has some pleasant accompaniments."

"Paul!" Julie called him that for the first time, "that girl kissed you!"

"Julie, you do not understand American social life. That is the flirt—it is rushing it—and it leaves a man's character, if he is as steady as I am, untouched. I yield to social observances of the country. It is a gentleman's duty. But my soul is above it. Serene, in its 'Ivory Tower.' "

The soul of Julie was not so serene. A little hereditary anger—after all, she was her mother's daughter—showed in her usually placid eyes.

"I have heard enough. Suppose you come and dance with me," she spoke firmly.

"You know I do not care for that," he returned gravely, "but if you insist—if you really wish—"

Decidedly Julie wished, and they swung out on the dancing-floor, and the jazzy tumult caught at their feet. It was a defiant and glorious Julie who did this thing. A lamp had been lit within her and her beauty glowed. Then other partners snatched at her. Paul stalked toward her in vain. But Mrs. Ledsky saw to it that he danced with several girls. Even Mary Ann, who wilted in his arms and whispered she would be faithful to him forever. Paul's soul was hurting him. At last he got away. He found his overcoat and slipped out into the afternoon garden and paced the wintry path. Alone. He was thinking of Julie and their walks up and down the long decks of the steamer—and of many other things. But always his thoughts came back to her. Had she, too, begun "rushing"? The mere idea gave him an interior ferment of distrust. A dark and solemn hour though the sun shone brightly. He leaned against the Emory motor-car in which he had come. An attitude of stern sorrow.

And to him, across the frozen path, came a golden Julie—her blonde tousled hair, her blonde

fur coat half covering the blonde gown; she made a womanly approach by asking: "What are you doing out here in the cold?"

He told her he was indifferent to heat and cold; he had mastered such trifles.

"I am going back to Paris," he announced.

"But your work? The bank? What will your parents say?"

"Well, I mean in the spring."

"Oh, quite a lovely coincidence. So are we."

Paul lived up to his sense of dignity and was silent. Julie found tongue:

"I'm so glad we are going to stay. I don't like the hotel, but I love it out here. I love Mrs. Ledsky. We are friends. And she is the very first real friend I ever had—I mean grown up. She has asked fa-ather to let me stay on for a visit. Mother has said yes. So I'm sure."

"I am sorry not to have been able to present my respects to Mr. Guelpa," remarked Paul politely.

"He's working as usual. He's over there in Professor Ledsky's laboratory. But he'll come soon. He knows you are to be here. I told him and he liked you so much on shipboard; and you know you and the Emorys are to stay on for dinner."

Paul had begun to forget his own importance—even his masterful soul; he looked at Julie's flushed face—her eyes were those of a huntress. Suddenly he grinned, like the boy he was, underneath all that ponderous weight of his ego.

"Julie, come round here—behind the car."

"What is it?" The warrior went out of her
es.

"Come," and she followed, it may be because he
ugged her along by the arm. When they were
lden behind the big car Paul suddenly caught her
his arms and kissed her. It was no unpractical
ss at that; it was a wild deep kiss that ran fierce-
through her from head to foot and then gathered
elf up and coiled round her heart and lay there,
nting, soft and warm.

"*Mon Dieu!*" She gasped when she could find
ice, "You are rushing *me*, I think!"

It was quite true; he had rushed her. He was
ashed when he realized it.

"Julie, may I ask permission of your parents?
ay I tell them I want you to be my wife? May
"

"But your parents, Paul?"

"Of course. Oh, Julie! Julie!"

That meant he was looking at her and finding
r beautiful.

"Stand quite still. No. Over there. The
ght is better. Not under that tree. Just there."

Paul, who had been taking snap-shots as they
ove out, snatched up his camera from the
morys' car. He snapped off a picture of Julie
she stood there in the garden.

"Now you take one of me," he said.

Julie glanced round furtively; they were quite

alone. From the house jazz poured but no eyes looked out. Swiftly they changed places, and Julie took a photograph.

"Oh, Paul!"

"Just for you and me."

"We must go in quick. I'll go first." And Julie sped away.

When Paul had put back his kodak, he walked to and fro readjusting his mask of dignity. Forever, he was telling himself. Well, marriage was the divine and human ordeal of the man who would do his duty by his soul. And love. The divine spark.

He glanced up at the tree with the crooked arms pointing to the house that held his chosen one. Being deep in the occult significance of things the young philosopher had thought at first it was not a good tree—warped and aged as a sorcerer. He deemed it might be even a devil-tree, of which, alas, there are far too many scattered over the world. Now he saw that, though aged, it was beneficent. It stood like a guard, decrepit but valiant, over the house that sheltered his love.

Gravely he went back to the jazz and laughter and the ices and wineless-cup and the cakes and to such trivial things; and to Julie—the apricot girl.

In the hall Mrs. Ledskey met him smiling. She had witnessed some of the little scene in the garden. She smiled, but it was a smile of pure sympathy.

and delight for no woman can touch even the hem of love—the first joyous love of youth—without thrilling to it.

“I am going to put you next to Julie to-night at dinner,” she whispered as she passed.

There Alva Spiller, the housekeeper, awaited her.

“Cumber’s back, ma’am,” Alva said harshly, with eyes full of smoldering animosity.

Mrs. Ledsky knew there was no love lost between the two, but she wondered a little at this manifestation of it.

“Very well,” she replied.

“He wants to give you a message?”

“Go and find out what it is, please, Alva.”

“I know. He told me. It’s the professor wanted you to know he has been called to Philadelphia on an important consultation. He won’t be back for a day or two. He said he wished you could persuade the French people to remain and keep you company. That’s all.”

“I think there is something else, Alva. What is it. Tell me.”

“Oh, it’s that Cumber accusing me of unlocking his door and leaving it open. How could I when he had the key?”

“Never mind, Alva. Don’t pay any attention to him.”

“I don’t. He isn’t worth it.”

Mrs. Ledsky hoped the Guelpas would stay on;

they must; especially Julie, Julie—and her young vision of love.

And in the dance-room she found that hitherto demure maiden, without a word to say for herself, bright-eyed and laughing, refusing dances, drinking the cold “cup,” and accepting invitations from maids and matrons for other social events. The little chicken was out of her shell and liked it.

Mrs. Guelpa extracted herself from the maze of Mrs. Emory’s French conversation. She was beginning to be domestically displeased with her Jules-Marie, hiding himself away in the laboratory. To her thoughts, already darkening into anger, was added a feeling of surprise that he should be guilty of such a social lapse. It was quite unlike him. Then there appeared Mrs. Ledsky telling her Mr. Guelpa was telephoning her from New York. The good lady was now somewhat alarmed.

“But how did he get there? What is he doing there? Without a word to me or to—you. I thought he was in the laboratory working.”

Mrs. Guelpa, without waiting for a reply to her questions, hastened to the telephone.

Clear and soothing there came to her the voice of Mr. Guelpa.

“Be calm, my dear,” the voice said, “it is Jules-Marie speaking. And I am sorry I must miss the party and the dinner. But circumstances arose which demanded my immediate presence in town. . . . Yes, yes, I am at the hotel. . . .

Never mind how I got here. I shall explain when I see you. I can not come out until to-morrow, or the next day, then I shall bring you in with me. . . . Certainly. . . . Yes. . . . I am sure I should be delighted for Julie to stay on for a little longer. . . . Yes, I know. It is Mrs. Ledsky's kind wish. And, Hortense, when the professor gets home, present my excuses and tell him I am busy on the 'case.' He will understand. I am working in his interests. . . . Yes. And present my excuses to Mrs. Ledsky. Then to-morrow or next day I will come for you. Good-by, my dear."

And before Mrs. Guelpa could say many things that would have been an education for her errant husband, the communication was cut.

She caught Julie out of the leave-taking in the hall and started to transfer her feelings regarding Mr. Guelpa to her child. Suddenly she checked. She stared at her offspring incredulously. What new triumphant personality was this, radiating through the tranquil and demure Julie, actually making inconsequential remarks about an unknown "him."

"Mother, he's dining here to-night. And to-morrow there's a lot of us going on a motor-trip. And I'm to be in his car. And, mother, he's going to Paris on the same boat we take. And, mother, he's going to speak to fa-ather—I mean to you and fa-ather—perhaps to-night!"

The guests who were not remaining to dinner,

left. It was not until that was over that Mrs. Guelpa got her daughter to herself.

"Come to our room, Julie. Oh, I am sure Mrs. Ledsky will excuse you for she knows you need a little rest before dinner."

As they went up-stairs Mrs. Guelpa spoke—the voice was motherly and good—saying: "Come, you must tell me about it."

Julie shrank into herself, for her mother was a terrifying darling. She clung to thoughts of Paul. *Mon Dieu!*—he had rushed her!

And meanwhile that tall youth, having first had a delightfully intimate talk with his fair hostess, had again gone out into the garden. He was hatless. He stared up into the darkening sky—entranced. Then the great deformed tree caught his attention. A strange tree, formidable. Gaunt and naked it rose pointing always at the stone house. He went close to it. In the trunk he discovered a gnarled hole that went back a dozen inches or so. The need of doing romantic things, which is love's compelling need, woke in him. He would tell Julie of that hiding-place. It should be their letter-box. Their secret. And to-morrow he would leave there for her the snap-shots—his photograph for her. To-night, at dinner, he would lead her into the secret of their hiding-place.

He backed away, glancing up at the tall tree that stood, pointing always at the stone house. No devil-tree. Their love would sanctify it. And

yet somehow—in some obscure way—it seemed now, as he saw it in the darkening evening light, it appeared to be making with its crooked arm a gesture of menace. Of destiny. Almost it was as though it were creaking out vague words, as its lean branches tossed and touched; vague warnings as though they were saying:

“House of darkness—house of evil—”

Paul's young exultant love laughed at forebodings.

How should he know that he—like souls more desperate and tragic—had been snared in the web of mystery woven round the disappearance of Bertha Benton?

How should he know?

CHAPTER XIV.

ARIADNE'S THREAD

MUSK and love, says the Turkish proverb, can not be hid; nor crime.

Murder, more than any other crime, seems to throw off radiations, persistent and palpable as those of musk; and the intuitive investigator senses them, long before he has traced them to their source. Even a crime deep-buried, long hidden, sends out these radiations, announcing: "I am here."

It was in the famous Demarra case, Mr. Guelpa caught just such a flying impression and built upon it, detail by detail, fact by fact, his compelling proof. The evidence, written in matter—the inanimate witness who can not lie—sent Demarra to the guillotine; it was long and patient research that marshaled them, but Demarra's head would never have rolled into the basket of sawdust, had not a trained intuitive sense caught the impalpable crime-emana-tions that came from the doorway of the house in the *rue Madame* in Versailles.

And now Mr. Guelpa, once more, had sensed the impalpable crime-aura. He smelled murder, as the Turk, far off, smells musk—the summoning

odor of love and musk. Patiently now he was hunting down the crime, marshaling those indestructible proofs that are always imprinted upon material things—the faint but eternal footprints of crime. This kind of proof, Mr. Guelpa said, is in the first place indicative. It proceeds from a technical study based on observation, hypothesis, experimentation and reasoning by analogy. The footprints of crime point out the way to a certitude physical rather than moral. And that the crime may be weighed in the balance of justice these material indications must be interpreted and only the expert criminologist can read them aright.

Bent over his broad table in the sitting-room of his hotel, Mr. Guelpa was studying the indices of his proofs.

There they lay.

And they called upon all the expert knowledge that made of him the perfected criminologist. His profession had transformed him into many men in one. He had the intelligent gift of observation, experience, prudence and the imagination that visualizes the true hypothesis; that was Mr. Guelpa; but in addition he had to be other men, chemist and medico-legal expert, toxicologist, graphologist, police-expert—and each of these experts worked with him to establish what his finer faculties had hypothesized.

There they lay on his table—the threads of Ariadne—the material threads.

"Parfait! C'est parfait!"

Mr. Guelpa was pleased with himself and with his work.

Hours passed as he bent over the absorbing problems which the Benton case presented, comparing, computing, deducting—

"And now for the human equation," he said, glancing at his watch, "now for the receptive and yet revealing light human testimony throws upon the little facts, pebbles of matter."

Watch in hand he waited.

If one is late for an appointment—or too early—that means something; it reveals the man himself. It was ten minutes before the appointment when a knock came at the door. The page-boy presented a card.

"Doctor Hamilton, by appointment, sir."

"Bring him up, please."

Mr. Guelpa liked the impatience which had spurred Doctor Hamilton to this appointment ten minutes before due time. He had made up his mind about this big bluff physician; he had gone behind the exterior boisterousness and seen honesty, sincerity and a kind-heartedness that blustered because it was half ashamed of its very sensitiveness. And he knew they had one aim in common—to find Mrs. Benton. Why Mr. Guelpa wanted to find her was plain enough; hers was the odor of murder-musk. He rather fancied Doctor Hamilton's motives were mixed—care for his professional honor

and repute—perhaps an emotional element entered into it—protectiveness—his truculent need of defending weak things, especially when they are hunted—Love—

Mr. Guelpa was no fool about love. He took it into account. Like everything good or bad, human or divine, it might be an important factor in a "case." Before sending for Doctor Hamilton he had let his imagination run. It was a way of his. He slipped into the other man's skin and tried to absorb the motives that seemed to be driving on this man of headlong impulse. He got it something like this:

The doctor was not a woman's man—he had seen too many of them inside and out; they were mere patients or corpses—and what he knew of them had stripped him of the illusions of love. He was still a man in his prime and so he had gone on for years. But the heart must love something. Even the worst man loves something—even if it is only himself. And Doctor Hamilton had carried gunpowder in his heart as he went about his business.

Then the woman? This Mrs. Benton?

The doctor had seen her often, there in the dimly lighted room, where she crouched in the big chair, near her dying husband. It is thus he would see her, desolate, with apathetic eyes—something white-faced, hiding in reticence, in moral loneliness. The mere sadness of it all—the tragedy,

that must have enveloped her in that house of infamous crime—no doubt went to his heart. And then perhaps it had not always been silence. What might she not have revealed of the woman within her at some moment when she and the doctor had been alone together? It may be a mere flash—out of her dreary apathy. A flash that quickened the gunpowder in his heart. And he may have seen her then, as lovers see women. He would have seen her, not the pathetic little figure, with grayish eyes dim with hidden dreams, the yellow of her hair all dead; not thus; he would have seen her miraculously alive in the sunlight of hope and freedom and love—dragged up from the depths to meet his love. His vision and ideal.

It was Mr. Guelpa's opinion that lovers have that way with them; and he had read a great deal about it—technical research as to its reactions.

And he was not very far off in his conjecture.

It was quite true that Mrs. Benton's helplessness and singular loneliness had struck at his heart. He thought of her as a little outcast soul adrift on dark waters. And since her disappearance he could not get her out of his mind. Her bully of a husband was dead. Now the bullies of law were hounding her. Where was she? In what peril and darkness and terror? With no one to protect her. She cried to him for help in his dreams.

In his blustering fashion he hunted her more fiercely than the dogs of law. He followed every

clue that might lead to her discovery. He had interviewed Benton's sporting friends, Nakki, the landlord of the Narrow House, the tradespeople, even Luella, the brown cook—nothing.

"I sure saw the cawpse, but I don't know nuthen about Mrs. Benton," she said and wagged her mahogany head.

He had seen Ringgold. Nothing. He had written letter after letter to the authorities and medical men of that mythical town in which she said she had been born, only to meet the same failure that had dogged his efforts from first to last.

And now Mr. Guelpa had summoned him—it was virtually a summons. Something more about the death certificate and be damned to him! Angina Pectoris. Well, so far as his professional judgment went, that had been the cause of Benton's death. True it had surprised him—this sudden taking off. He had not expected it. He was willing to admit that he had been surprised. But suspect foul play? Why should he? Or any sane man? He wished the authorities would come at him in the open. He'd like to have it out with them. Only—there was the woman. A fugitive. Suffering God knows what agony from her baseless fears of these law-dogs. And Mr. Guelpa was the worst of them.

This was the mood in which Doctor Hamilton entered Mr. Guelpa's sitting-room, but he kept his aggressiveness and his emotion under cover, and

his manner was cold and dignified. He towered over the little man who came smilingly to meet him. They shook hands. Before taking the proffered chair the doctor asked curtly:

"Well, have you found Mrs. Benton?"

Mr. Guelpa threw out his expressive hands in a gesture that took away all hope.

"Ah, Doctor Hamilton, I wish I had. And you? I hoped you might have had some news of her by this time."

"I have no news. You seem to have frightened her away among you. You see I include you, Mr. Guelpa. I admit that money is a strong motive."

Mr. Guelpa answered this remark very quietly, but those who knew him best would have been on their guard.

"I think that is a personal remark aimed directly at me, Doctor. Please understand I am not paid for what I am doing. In my professional capacity I am assisting my friend, Mr. Faynis, in this case. I am also anxious to be of service to my colleague Professor Ledskey. What we are looking for is the truth—and I have been looking for it in every cranny of minds, souls, and bodies for over thirty years. You are after the truth, also, I am certain. That is why I claim your assistance." The amicable smile reappeared on Mr. Guelpa's old-young face and he added, "For our interest in this case is the same."

"To find Mrs. Benton?"

"Precisely. And I do not think anything has happened to her. She will reappear."

Doctor Hamilton did not speak.

"We are helping each other? You absolve me from any wrong motive? The truth. And I am going to tell you what we have found out, so far. I want to find Mrs. Benton, to dissipate the mystery surrounding her and clear up the insurance swindle in which she unquestionably is involved. Above all, as I just observed, I desire to render a service to my fellow-scientist, Professor Ledsky, of whom you no doubt have heard."

"Certainly I have heard of him. Who has not?"

"Well this is why I mention him. When Mrs. Benton slipped away from the Narrow House she was followed by detectives. She took refuge—where? In the most unlikely place in the world—in Professor Ledsky's country house."

"What!" Doctor Hamilton exclaimed, startled out of his self-imposed calm.

"Our men never lost her trail; they followed her there, saw her enter the house, and swear she never left it. Do I believe them? When I reached the house in company with Professor Ledsky—he was frankly incredulous—she had at all events disappeared once more."

"The detectives may have been mistaken in thinking she entered there."

"Always possible—the human error. The evi-

dence given by human eyes is invariably subject to error. A mere impression on the retina, transmitted, mixed with other impressions and imaginative reflexes—what men say they have seen is not always trustworthy I admit. But Mrs. Benton? No matter whither she fled, or where she is now concealed, we have learned many curious things about her. We are to assist each other? You must know them. You will listen?"

Doctor Hamilton nodded assent; he showed no surprise when Mr. Guelpa began his resumé by naming Miss Kittie Glenn, though he remembered her suspicious visit. The rest followed:

How she had supplied the telegram signed Peter Benton which had been sent to her by the man known as Benton; how Nakki, directed by the dying man, had written the telegram and sent it; how Kittie had produced a letter written to her by Benton, whom she expected to marry; and, with this, Benton's evident conspiracy with the originators of the swindle. He narrated how they had absolute proof that Mrs. Benton, under the name of Beth Forsythe, had collected ten thousand dollars from an insurance company in Los Angeles where Mr. George Ringgold happened to be the claim clerk; how he had positively identified her; how the supposed husband in that affair—a man named Forsythe—had died apparently as Benton died. Finally, the letter, telegram, the signature on both policies—and the other indicative proofs—demonstrated that Richard Ben-

on was known in Los Angeles as Peter Barling; and that Bertha Benton was Beth Forsythe.

Doctor Hamilton held himself in hand. If Mr. Guelpa had counted on an outbreak he misjudged his big man, usually so forthright and blusteringly open; Doctor Hamilton might have been a Sphinx for all the emotion he showed as the crime-record of the woman he loved was revealed.

That be damned. It was part of all this law-doggery. His great generous heart told him she was innocent. A victim, perhaps, but innocent—innocent.

So when he spoke it was in a matter-of-fact way.

"Is that all you have got against her?"

"Not quite. And this is where we can help each other," Mr. Guelpa leaned forward, speaking softly. Please tell me, Doctor Hamilton, who was the man who went so often to her home, during the fatal illness of her husband?"

"Man? What man?"

"Who came so often. Who lounged with easy familiarity in her bedroom—"

"What!"

"In her bedroom, leaning on the mantelpiece, looking down at her while she lay on her couch listening—listening—to his slow voice!"

Hamilton's self-control might have snapped at his suggestion, but he held it fast.

"I saw no one there."

"The nurse?"

"She saw no one there."

"The thick-set man, in dingy gray, a flabby man—"

"How the devil should I know what you mean. I tell you there was no such man in her house. And Doctor Hamilton began to kindle and raise a angry voice. "What kind of a beastly scandal are you trying to build up round that poor woman now? Mrs. Benton had no visitors. She was, God help her, an utter stranger in New York. I know that for a fact. The nurse who was there for several weeks will tell you the same thing. Except Nurse McCune and myself there was no one in this city to stand by her. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, Doctor."

"Why don't you question Mrs. McCune? I can tell you where she is."

"That has already been done. She knows nothing."

"Of course not. Because there is nothing to be known. There is no such man."

"No? You are very loyal to Mrs. Benton—your patient, was she not?"

"No. Her husband was my patient."

"At all events it will interest you to know," Mr. Guelpa said, shooting out the words, "*I have found that man.* Eh? Now you wake up! Yes, the flabby man in the dingy coat, eh? Will you come here a moment—to that big table?"

Almost in spite of himself Doctor Hamilton followed the urgent little man to the center of the room:

"You see. There—there on the table is the old coat I am speaking of. Now beside it—you see that cast? You know all about that sort of thing?"

Doctor Hamilton stared silently at Mr. Guelpa's exhibit, which he had brought with him from the lawyer's office and which was now spread out on the table with the cast.

"Certainly, I know," he grunted.

"I am glad, for then I shall only be obliged to give you a few details to make myself clear. That is the cast of the imprint of this coat sleeve in the dust, which lay on the mantelpiece in Mrs. Benton's bedroom. Traced in the dust, the imprint might have been blown away by a breath; but it remained; and now it is solid as—matter, permanent, eh? It tells the story of the man who leaned, lounging in Mrs. Benton's bedroom, while her husband lay dying—waiting? Watching? For what?"

"You can actually prove that those marks were made by that coat?"

"See for yourself. The thread marks are as individual as the pores in the skin of your hand. They are not merely like each other. *They are duplicates.* That is a way matter has—to be as individual as a human ego. Those imprints were made by that sleeve. And now," Mr. Guelpa lifted daintily the weed threads he had found in a tiny splintered

channel of the old wooden mantelpiece, "now I show you something else, eh? This is a fragment of the same coat. I, oh, I have proved it, Doctor. Not only by the texture, but the very dirt in it, human and material, was brother to the dirt of the coat. But you do not want the process. You know that. You want the fact. And the man? Just a little thread, eh? But it led me to him. Like Ariadne's thread. It is strong, Doctor, very strong—I really think this little thread is strong enough to hang a man by the neck until he is dead."

"You say you have actually found this man?"

"Now mark who he is. He is in Ledsky's service. You see? Half laboratory assistant, half servant, I should say. There I found him?"

"And what does Ledsky think?"

"I have not told him yet. He does not know. He believes in this fellow, Cumber, although his wife, Mrs. Ledsky, does not; indeed she agrees with me that the professor has been deceived in him and that he is not to be trusted. We believe he effected Mrs. Benton's escape, concealed her in Professor Ledsky's house unknown to the family, and then contrived somehow to spirit her away."

"And since then," Doctor Hamilton asked, "no trace of her has been found?"

"None."

The doctor hesitated before putting a question which he feared betrayed too much of his anxiety.

"You do not think the man, this Cumber, has made way with her?"

"That might be a possibility, but I do not see Cumber that way. He has neither the courage—nor the extreme cowardice—to kill any one. I believe he has hidden her, yes. And through him we may get trace of her and the other men involved in the swindle."

Mr. Guelpa was studying his man—the quick reactions—his body-hid emotions; he wondered how much Mrs. Benton knew of the impression she had made upon the truculent and chivalrous physician; had they been drawn closer together than the doctor was inclined to admit?

"Doctor Hamilton," he asked at length, "if I need a man's help may I count upon you? One moment. Professor Ledsky has been called away. He has kindly lent me his laboratory and I have work I should be doing there now. Mrs. Ledsky is with me heart and soul in unraveling this mystery, which has fallen upon her very home. But in case I need a man's help—one I can trust."

"Should Mrs. Benton be run down, you mean?"

"Just so."

"If I can do anything!" the doctor said; he was not quite certain what he was being drawn into, nor what motive lay under the apparently frank request: "If you want me let me know. You can telephone me."

"That is good. You could motor up or take a train, eh?"

"Yes, Westchester County? I know it quite well."

"Thank you."

Doctor Hamilton had risen.

"May I detain you a moment longer?"

The doctor paused:

"Miss Kittie Glenn—"

The doctor smiled grimly, in his beard; he well remembered that girl and her visit. And he had apparently misjudged her.

"Miss Glenn has given me a snap-shot photograph of Peter Barling—Benton, eh? And of his wife, Mrs. Benton. I am at a disadvantage. I have never seen either of them, though the insurance people have. Do you also recognize them?"

"Of course. The man is Benton."

"And the woman? The lady?"

"It is not very clear to me, but I think I recognize her." He held the photograph in his hand for some time, studying it reflectively, before he added, "It is a good likeness."

"Do you notice anything else in the photograph?"

"The tree, you mean?"

"Not a tree, Doctor, but the *shadow* of a tree has fallen upon it. And that tree, I think, stands in the lawn of the Ledsky home. The picture. And that means? Cumber again. During one of the periods when the professor and his wife were absent, Cumber apparently had both the Bentons up there and took this snap-shot. A shadow on the film. Something he perhaps did not notice. I ad

nit it is not much to positively identify the place the photograph was taken. And yet because it is so insignificant an indication—so vague—it is even more important, for you see, *it was not meant to be there*. You shall come to that house and look for yourself—the shadow, eh? It is very interesting.”

They were still studying the shadow when Mr. Ringgold was announced. He entered with his usual dignity, but a hint of amusement was on his grim face. Behind him was the flushed and outraged youth who was Paul Dupuis.

“How do you do, Mr. Ringgold, and ah, *you*, Mr. Dupuis!”

“This young gentleman was found in suspicious circumstances prowling about the Ledsky home and our very active detectives brought him to our office,” Mr. Ringgold explained, “and he insisted upon seeing you.”

“Well?” Mr. Guelpa was all twinkling urbanity.

Paul was deeply aggrieved; his personal dignity had been mauled about; his ego had been man-handled.

“I wish, sir, you would permit me to speak to you alone,” he said. “I had a perfect explanation of my presence there, but I couldn’t tell those fools!”

“No? The mousetrap. You got in, but you couldn’t get out, eh? Never mind the others. They are all friends of mine.”

“I shall leave you,” said Doctor Hamilton.

“No, no, you may want to hear this. You must

know that Mr. Dupuis is an old friend and acquaintance—the son, too, of a friend. Come, Paul, why did you poke your nose into the mousetrap? Speak out! What were you after?”

Paul summoned a kind of defiant courage.

“Your daughter, sir.” And his voice broke.

“Julie!” And Mr. Guelpa’s amazement was real. He gasped.

And Paul, repeating that magic word “Julie” rushed his boyish recital at him. He told of the snap-shots he and Julie had taken in the garden, how he had developed and printed them, and taken them with him to Ledsky’s house, to hide them for her in a cavity of the old tree near the door. She would look for them. And just as he had managed to get through the hedge unseen—

“Here they are, Mr. Guelpa,” he exclaimed with sudden desperation. He took an envelope from his pocket. “And there’s a letter. I am not ashamed of it. I want you to read it and then you will understand.”

In spite of a flustering sense of indignation Paul carried himself in a manly way, as he confronted the formidable “step.”

Mr. Guelpa examined him with quizzical but not unkindly eyes.

“*Tiens! tiens!* Julie! Here, my lad, take back your letter. It is quite too romantic a thing for me to handle. That is a matter for Julie—and I may add, for Mrs. Guelpa.”

The photographs he looked at smilingly, seeing a wide-eyed simpering Julie and an erect beaming Paul. Then suddenly he snapped out: "Ah, come here, Doctor Hamilton, look at this!"

"The shadow!" the doctor exclaimed, after glancing at the picture.

"More than the shadow! There is part of the tree itself—that lean limb pointing downward."

"It is unmistakable."

"Almost precisely where that photograph of the Bentons was taken! Near the Ledsky house. It confirms my proof. It is all I want. The Bentons posed there, almost where those children played their little comedy of love-making."

"Comedy!" Paul cried. "Comedy!"

"There, there," murmured Mr. Guelpa soothingly, "I did not want to hurt your feelings. Comedy was the wrong word. As a matter of fact you have done me an immense service. And my step-fatherly indulgence is limitless, but what Mrs. Guelpa will say to her daughter—*tiens!*"

CHAPTER XV

PETER BARLING

MR. GUELPA arrived at the Ledsky home in time to dine. He brought with him a troubled but not reluctant Paul. And the story he related of that young romanticist's adventure made for laughter. Even Mrs. Guelpa laughed hollowly. Every one seemed to see the humor of the situation, except Julie, who had no sense of humor, and Paul. Mrs. Ledsky, valiant hostess, came to their rescue.

"I knew all about it, Mrs. Guelpa," she confessed, "except of course that romantic letter-box. I saw them in the garden, but of course I couldn't betray them. You wouldn't have wanted me to spoil it, would you, Mrs. Guelpa?"

Mrs. Ledsky looked so charmingly young, so innocent herself, as she put the question to her guest, that Mrs. Guelpa absolved her with a smile.

"It was quite American, yes? And we have different ways in France," she said, "but I am learning."

"Julie, too," suggested Mr. Guelpa.

Mrs. Guelpa refused to be drawn as to Julie; that could wait.

"We all have found freedom here," Mrs. Ledsky proclaimed, "boys and girls, too—it's the right way. Freedom means knowledge, and knowledge of life means safety and happiness."

"I agree with that, Madame." And Paul's approval was dignified; the philosopher approved.

"And your husband, Mrs. Ledsky?" Mr. Guelpa inquired. "When may we expect him? Our little visit is drawing to an end—much as I regret it—and I should very much like to see the professor before we leave, which must be no later than to-morrow."

"I am so sorry. Must you really go so soon? Professor Ledsky may not return to-morrow—he is in Philadelphia—but the next day he is sure to be here," his hostess replied; "and in any case, you must know, I shall keep Julie. Her mother has consented, because really an hotel is a stupid place for a young girl. She needs companionship of her own age—"

"Like yourself," Mr. Guelpa interposed gallantly.

"Eleanor is twenty-five," put in Julie, "she told me so."

"Eleanor!" Mr. Guelpa exclaimed, "eh?"

"I asked her to call me Eleanor, I love to hear her say it."

"You are spoiling her?"

"And Eleanor calls me Julie, of course. And we are going on a long motor-ride and dine at a club-house, oh, many of us—Paul, too!"

"Paul!" echoed Mr. Guelpa, raising his eyebrows.

"Don't prattle, Julie," her mother advised the bubbling girl.

It was not until later that Paul got a whispered word with her. It went like this:

"They've got our photographs—oh, Paul!"

"But I can print some more. They haven't got the films. And to-morrow I'll bring them straight up to the front door—and to you. Oh, Julie!"

"Paul!"

"Dear Julie!"

"Paul!"

"Dear Julie!"

"No, no, you mustn't! If some one should come. Well, there!"

"That was only a peck."

"Paul."

"Please—"

When Julie got her breath she made use of it to say: "And Mary Ann?"

"Don't think of her. She is a child—a child-vamp, a love-gamester, and infant vivisectionist—she is only playing with her immature emotions. I understand the American girl, thoroughly, Julie. And I have banished Mary Ann from existence. We are alone."

But Paul was mistaken. Mrs. Ledsky joined them, adorably sympathetic, and right then and there entered into a conspiracy with them. And

Paul departed in his taxi-cab which for hours had been ticking away the money of an estimable banker in Paris. Julie escaped to her bed and lay for hours reveling in adoration of her Paul and fierce hatred of Mary Ann. At last, round and pink, she fell asleep and dreamed about her hero, struggling in the toils of an infant demon—with a mouth like Mary Ann's. Her mother retired, calm and silent and a trifle gloomily. She was thinking of her child and preparing what should be said the next day; also she wondered whether the Paris banker were as rich as people said.

Mr. Guelpa lingered in the living-room where a fire blazed for him and his hostess. He had some information he desired to impart to her.

He began by telling her of Doctor Hamilton, for always these two kept going back to the "case." As he talked he was looking half consciously at her. She had been unusually brilliant and joyous all the evening. A spirit of joy. Her youth? She was not so very young—twenty-five as Julie had said. There was another magic than that of youth emanating from her. It was as though some radiant spirit within were asserting itself through her enchanting personality. Why not? Mr. Guelpa was no dogmatist regarding what is inside a woman. Why shouldn't it be a soul, eh? He did not think it improbable. And now he had an evil task to perform. Cumber—well, he would come to it—

"Doctor Hamilton is evidently deeply affected

by that woman's disappearance," he said; "he has grave apprehensions as to her safety."

"You mean?"

"He fears she may have been made way with."

"Killed!"

"To get rid of her—to prevent her betraying her associates. I do not know. But this man, Cumber—"

"I hate him."

"Your judgment of him is not at fault," Mr. Guelpa replied; then he told her of the discovery he had made in the Narrow House, the imprint, the coat he had taken from Cumber's room. Mrs. Ledsky was plainly terrified.

"And that wretch is here—in my home—my husband's trusted servant!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I am afraid!"

"You have nothing to fear, Mrs. Ledsky. I am not, strictly speaking, of a warlike nature, but I think my protection will suffice until your husband returns. I shall most certainly remain if it will ease your mind."

"It will—it will—besides Professor Ledsky himself desired it."

"And remember there is a man or two at hand. Your house is guarded."

"I am afraid of Cumber," she repeated. "In spite of all you say I am afraid of him."

"No, no, he is the one who is afraid. Or soon will be."

"Then he was really conspiring with that awful woman——"

"Beyond doubt."

"You think he helped her kill her husband? To share the insurance money. That awful man! What could attract her to him?"

"You know," Mr. Guelpa remarked reflectively, "even a man like that can fall in love. He may have wanted Mrs. Benton. He saw a way to set her free and gain a fortune—his kind of love would always smell of crime. I wonder! Is it too late to have Cumber summoned? You could send for him?"

"Of course I can send, but he may not come. He knows the professor is away." She rang for Alva and gave the message.

"He will come," Mr. Guelpa said calmly, "he will be afraid not to come."

And Cumber came. He slouched in the doorway with an air of sullen indifference.

"You wanted me?" he addressed Mrs. Ledsky.

"Yes. Please sit down. Mr. Guelpa desires to ask you a few questions."

"One or two—just a few," Mr. Guelpa remarked in his affable way, "about Mrs. Benton."

Cumber showed no mark of interest.

"How long did you know her, prior to her disappearance, eh?"

Cumber started, then slumped back in his chair.

"I've already said I didn't know her. Isn't my word sufficient?"

"No," Mr. Guelpa returned a trifle grimly, "it is not sufficient—time and again you were in her bedroom—leaning on her mantelpiece—wearing that coat."

Mr. Guelpa took up the coat, which had lain, folded under a rug, at the foot of a sofa.

"That's your coat?"

"Yes. What is it doing here?"

"I purloined it, Mr. Cumber, from your closet. In the interest of science. And justice, eh? It is the one you wore in those conferences with the Benton woman, whose husband, eh? is—dead—"

Cumber got heavily to his feet, pushing back the chair with a lurch of his thighs.

"This is some sort of frame-up," he said thickly, "but I don't fall for it. I've nothing to say to you."

"That is a pity," observed Mr. Guelpa, "because I want to give you a chance to explain. You will really oblige me if you sit down again, unless you prefer to stand."

Cumber went sulkily to his chair. He was furiously defiant, but his face had gone white and fear lurked in his eyes. Mr. Guelpa walked up to him and suddenly held out the snap-shot of Mr. and Mrs. Benton.

"Know that? See it? When did you take it—this photograph of the Bentons? Come!"

One glance was sufficient; Cumber's eyes fell, and he crouched back in his chair.

"I see you recognize it," Mr. Guelpa said quickly.

"I never saw it before."

"No? And you didn't take it? And you do not know where it was taken?"

"I've told you I never saw it until you stuck it in my face."

"Cumber, you took it—and within a few feet of the door of this house."

"Mr. Guelpa!" Mrs. Ledsky cried out, "then that woman has been here—in my house!"

"She was here and with Benton—and Cumber photographed them in the garden. Here is the shadow of the crooked tree. Just so it appears in the photograph Paul took of my daughter, from almost the same spot. Light plays queer tricks with a film. It marked for positive identification the photograph Cumber took of the Bentons—with a shadow. Look here, Cumber, you had better tell us all about it, while you have the chance. No one who was in that swindle is going to escape. Mrs. Benton has already been identified as a Mrs. Forsythe who played the same game out in Los Angeles five years ago. And Benton—her husband—the man in this picture you took in the garden—was with her at that time. You recognize him?"

"No, I tell you," Cumber, snarling, heaved forward savagely, "but if you ask her perhaps—" He shot a menacing finger straight at Mrs. Ledsky—"She'll tell you who he is, damn you!"

And Cumber flung himself out of the room slamming the door after him.

"The insolence!" Mrs. Ledsky exclaimed, "how dare he! I am so sorry—"

"His insolence? Does that matter? I'm used to the menace of criminals and that man is a criminal—a born criminal. He has convicted himself."

"But what did he mean about the picture?" she asked. "I scarcely understood him. Please let me see it."

Without a word he placed in her hand the photograph. She looked at it wonderingly; then stifled a scream.

"My God! Mr. Guelpa, where did this come from?"

He did not tell her; it was no moment for talk of Miss Kittie Glenn, who had lent him the Benton snap-shot.

Instead he asked: "Do you recognize the woman?"

"No, no! But the man? I recognize the man."

"Mr. Benton?"

"No, no, that is Peter Barling," and her voice quivered.

"You know him?"

"He is my brother."

In his long career Mr. Guelpa had faced many startling revelations, but this one held him speechless. Mechanically he took the photograph from her hand. At last he found words.

"I am so sorry I startled you," he said gently. "I could not dream that this man was your brother."

"And you say he is married to that—woman?"

"More than that I am afraid, Mrs. Ledsky. You are forgetting. Peter Barling, known as Richard Benton, was not only implicated in the swindle in Los Angeles, but in that of the Great Orient here."

"Peter? My brother?" She did not seem to grasp the fact.

"Tell me about your brother, Mrs. Ledsky, if you can confide in me."

It was not a pleasant story for a woman to tell of her only brother—the black-sheep who had driven their parents to poverty, and a welcome death. He was considerably older than she; he would be about forty now. She had not seen him for a long time—years. He had had every opportunity that education and environment could give a young man. He had been expelled from college for a gambling scandal. He was always a gambler. He had robbed his father and mother. But when the parents died there had been some money left for both of them. He had run through his own and then through most of theirs. She had paid and paid. And then after she was married, he had hunted her out again. Her husband had tried to reform him, but it was no use. He would accept no kind of work. He would go his own way, which was a way of gaming, debauch, theft perhaps—Professor Ledsky had got him out

of a case of blackmail, but after that would have nothing more to do with him. It was then she learned that her brother had gone out West—to Los Angeles. Once he had telegraphed he was dying and she had gone out there to see him during Professor Ledsky's absence in Europe. But it had turned out to be a ruse to get more money from her and she returned, resolved never to have anything more to do with him. From that time she had heard nothing—nothing—until this—

"It will be a terrible blow to my husband, when he knows. And Peter. What shall I do?"

She was trembling as she made this appeal to him, and Mr. Guelpa, deeply touched, tried to comfort her.

"Why, he must have been here all this time," she went on, "and Cumber? Of course he could easily have got to know Cumber. He has been with us for years. Oh, Mr. Guelpa, then they did hide that woman here—in this house. Surely you can make Cumber confess where they did hide her."

"He will tell everything. Have no fear. His violence was meant to cover his cowardice, and a frightened man always tells."

"His terrible voice! He would do anything!"

"Even murder, yes," Mr. Guelpa agreed, "if his fear is deadly enough. You see a coward is always—"

Mr. Guelpa stopped abruptly. Mrs. Ledsky was staring at him, her eyes widened with horror.

"You think Peter was—is—Mr. Guelpa, what has happened to my brother? Benton was murdered! And Benton—but he was my brother, Peter Barling—Mr. Guelpa—"

"Forgive me, I should have prepared you—I thought you understood."

"Peter is dead. My brother is dead."

"Yes."

"Murdered?"

"I have no doubt of it."

Mrs. Ledsky did not break down; she hardly moved; there was horror like a veil over her face; her terrified eyes stared at the little man in front of her—stared.

CHAPTER XVI

SLEEP AND DEATH

IT was a quiet night. The snow fell softly, shrouding the crooked tree, covering the garden and the stone house. And Mr. Guelpa slept. That was his way. No matter how active his waking hours had been, when he had a right to sleep, he took possession of it as completely as Napoleon did. He quenched the light of wakefulness in his active brain—blew it out like a candle—and was immediately asleep.

And so he lay in the quiet of the windless night, and slept. Yet now and then he turned uneasily on his pillow, as though his sleeping brain were receiving faint impressions that something was going on—that the night was full of evil activity. But he slept on, because his sleep was self-willed and self-imposed, and he was master of it as he was master of himself. Had a star fallen and exploded over the stone house, his self-determined sleep would have been unbroken. He had awarded himself six unconscious hours and he alone could change their steady sequence.

Without, the haphazard watch of the company's

detectives had ceased—at least the night-watch had ceased. The mousetrap had failed. It had caught neither the mysterious Mrs. Benton nor an accomplice of hers slipping in and out; it had caught only Mr. Guelpa and the wandering romanticist, Paul Dupuis. But in the morning Grogan or Tim Lear could prowls about as usual, for a paid job is a paid job; but this night of obliterating snow had driven them to rooms and blankets in the village near by. They, too, slept.

And Cumber?

It was in his destiny, also, to sleep deeply that night. Soundly.

Even the cold dawn that came and stared into his window did not wake him.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Aman-a, the day-cook, came up from the village. That was her hour. During the two years she had been the Ledskys' cook she had never been early or late. Born in the village she had lived her forty barren years there. Gaunt, tall, thin, erect, long-faced, she had the forbidding exterior of the predestined spinner, but the soul within her was tremulous, gentle, love-hungry.

She opened the door to the kitchen with her key. It was cold there, bitter cold; she lighted the cooking-range and went up-stairs to the garret room, where she kept a few of her possessions. She heard the housekeeper stirring; that was well; she tapped good morning as she passed; but Cumber should be

stirring, too; she rapped on his door—and the door swung away from her hand. The room was filled with the bleak dim daylight.

She peered in.

And then wild terror seized her and she screamed aloud—the scream of a terrified horse shrill and shaken.

Mr. Guelpa's sleep fell from him. In a flash he was up the stairs. And Jules-Marie Guelpa disclosed himself as he was, the few long strands of hair he used to cover his baldness with, hung down over his neck, his pajamas revealed his old bones but the eyes were alert and the eye-glasses were astride the lean nose. He caught Amanda by the arm.

"What are you screaming for, like that?"

She was leaning against the door, chalk-faced quivering.

"In there," she gasped, "look at it!"

Mr. Guelpa thrust her aside.

"Be quiet—stop that."

He stepped lightly into the room.

Cumber was in bed: a bloodstained bed. And Cumber was dead; for a bullet had torn through his brain. Long dead, for when Mr. Guelpa touched his hand it was very cold—the hand near which lay as though it had fallen from the inert fingers, a revolver. Near his right hand, on the bed. His left arm hung over the edge, almost straight down, pointing to a pool of drying blood.

Mr. Guelpa swung round quickly.

Women were crowding at the doorway: Mrs. Ledsky, Julie, their night-clothes partly covered, Alva—

“Go away,” Mr. Guelpa commanded, approaching them hastily, “there is nothing you can do. And this is no sight for you. This man is dead.”

Julie was quiet, round-eyed; Alva waited patiently, her peasant mind not yet awake to realization; Mrs. Ledsky stared, with fixed eyes, into the room—straight at the bed—but she did not speak. She seemed cold and quiet as the man who lay dead.

Mr. Guelpa urged them away from the door and locked it from without.

“Can you telephone for the police, Alva?”

“Yes, sir, I can.”

“Then do it at once. Mrs. Ledsky, I beg you to go to your room. Julie, you too. Help Mrs. Ledsky to her room.”

He did not wait for them to go. The key of Cumber’s room in his hand, he dashed back to his apartment. There he put on an overcoat over his pajamas and opened the window.

He took from a night-table his old Paris police-whistle. It was the signal he had arranged with the company’s men who were supposed to be watching the stone house.

“That can wait,” he muttered, and mounted quickly the flight of stairs to where the dead man lay. He went to the bed.

Suicide, eh? Mr. Guelpa had not expected that turn of events. He had expected, after the psychic offensive he had driven at Cumber the night before, he had, indeed, expected him to weaken—the mind still sick with fear and guilt seeking relief in avowal. But no; Cumber was a moral sloven—he couldn't even tidy up his crime by confessing it. No. It was suicide. Who was there to kill him, save the man himself? Suicide, Mr. Guelpa reasoned.

Yes, his own revolver got him at last.

It was always that way. His revolver. His own familiar weapon. It lay on his table, or in a drawer, or smuggled in his pocket. He saw it every day. Then came the hour of terror and despair, when suddenly it ceased to be dead matter, mere steel and lead, and cried aloud to him. It called to him: "See! I am here! Come!" And the poor devil, trapped and fear-shaken, heard the call. He took it up. Whiff! And that is suicide.

Mr. Guelpa glanced round. The room was in order. On the table by the bed was a writing-pad. Mr. Guelpa picked it up.

"Of course," he told himself grimly, "of course! The most abject soul when it goes out, wants to leave behind a justification—one last pompous lie. A tribute to vanity."

He looked at the paper: two loose leaves. The first was written by a fairly firm hand in pencil. The limp soul of the man who was about to kill him-

self had not yet made the hand waver; vanity upheld it. He read:

Having been betrayed and lost everything this evening, on account of both, I decided what to do. Don't think I am insane—I know full well what would happen and have good reason to know, having suffered the tortures of Hell.

“Yours truly,
“Ernest Cumber.”

The writing did not end with this signature; it went on unbrokenly:

I kill myself to escape, not from what I have done, but to escape from the demon.

“Yours respectfully,
“Ernest Cumber.”

That was the first page. Mr. Guelpa laid it back on the table.

“Is any man quite sane,” he asked himself, “when he determines to kill himself?”

He took up the second leaf. Here the handwriting was spasmodic—it wobbled all over the page and the pencil had dug holes in the soft paper.

I am not—afraid—to hell with them—having been thoroughly betrayed—not afraid—the fiend can do nothing to me now”—

At the foot of the page, scrawled by a hand that only desperate resolution forced to carry on were

lines and dashes that seemed meaningless, the mere written gesticulations of terror.

The second leaf Mr. Guelpa slipped into his pocket.

He went out, locked the door and hurried to his bedchamber.

Before dressing, he opened his window, leaned out and blew twice—two shrill blasts on his silver whistle. He dressed quickly, though he shaved and waxed up his mustache and combed carefully over his bony head the lank scalp-locks that failed to hide his baldness. Then once more he sent out the signal. A moment later he saw Grogan stalking across the snow-covered lawn and approaching the house. Grogan, back on duty, had heard the signal, and Mr. Guelpa was in time to reach the kitchen to meet him at the door.

It was the destiny of Amanda to cook for other people, and the routine of getting breakfast had brought back a little of her acid calm of demeanor, and she kept her mind on what she was doing. Alva was aiding her.

"You telephoned to the police?" Mr. Guelpa asked.

"Yes, sir, I did," replied Alva heavily, "he'll be coming up. I told him Cumber shot himself."

"Thank you. Come in, Grogan."

"My God! that bird done himself in?" exclaimed Grogan.

"Come and see for yourself. You might have a look round before the police arrive."

Cumber had not moved: he was done with that sort of thing, until the death-fauna went more violently about their destructive activities.

"That's the gun. A neat job," said Grogan, "and that's the farewell-naughty-world-I'm-going-home, I guess," he added, picking up the page of paper which Mr. Guelpa had replaced on the night-table. "Yep, and batty as they make them, he was, Yours respectfully.' What do you think of that?"

"It will be clear enough for the police, eh? Suicide."

"Sure. Let them take him. It's a coroner's case all right. Say, I'll push 'em along and have 'em get the body out of here."

"The sooner the better."

"Did he figure in your case, sir?"

Grogan had learned a great deal from Tim Lear since their experience in arresting Mr. Guelpa; he knew the big little man was with them in the Bencon mystery.

"At least he has gone out of it now," Mr. Guelpa returned, glancing at the white flabby face on the bed, a bullet-hole drilled through the head. "Will you see to everything? No. I had better explain this suicide and say I called you in. You can give any explanation of your presence you please. But I want the body out of the house. The women can't stand it."

"Leave it to me, sir."

And to Grogan it was left—a long leaving. The

local policeman arrived, with another man; then the coroner and his physician; they had much to say though there was little need of many words. There lay the dead man, the revolver at his side, his signed statement of his determination to commit suicide on the table. There was Amanda to question, she who discovered the body. And Mr. Guelpa who had heard her cry out. And Alva and the ladies who had been brought up-stairs to the door of the sinister room by her scream.

"Had any one heard a revolver shot in the night?"

No one.

"He shot himself," said the coroner's physician "about three o'clock."

He read the death note.

"Did the late Cumber drink heavily? Drugs?"

No one had suspected such things of him.

"Signs of dementia?"

"He was always sullen, kept to himself;" Alva admitted he was queer.

"Well, his brain tipped over," said the coroner's official; "that letter was written by a crazy man."

Being young he was confident and desirous of impressing the famous criminologist.

Mr. Guelpa, when Mrs. Ledskey had finished answering questions, led her not to her own room but to that of Julie.

"You will be better here," he said gently.

"You did what I asked?" she inquired.

"Yes, I was fortunate to get Professor Ledskey on the telephone in the Philadelphia hotel you mentioned."

"It's a God's mercy you are here, Mr. Guelpa. What should I have done if I had been alone—with Alva and that man!"

"Do not think of that now. Your husband will come by the first train," he replied.

"I'm thinking of him. Cumber was more than his servant—he was his protégé and friend. In spite of all I said, he could not believe anything bad against him. He would not believe it—that Cumber had been hiding Mrs. Benton in this house. But now when they know so much about Cumber—his visits to the Benton house, the photograph—he will have to believe it." She broke off.

"Mr. Guelpa," she went on at last, "I must tell him, too, all about Peter—my brother—"

"Let me explain everything to him, my dear lady. It will all be a great shock to him. But I shall try and make it easy for him. His nerves are not steady, I know, but underneath he is strong and ready for anything that can happen. And I shall prepare him. His confidence in Cumber has been terribly abused, both by Cumber and his associates. The professor was totally unsuspecting. As for your poor brother—he will understand and forgive."

The unhappy woman seemed to find strength in Mr. Guelpa's sympathy; and now both Julie and her mother were with her.

He left the women together.

He had already telephoned Steeger. That message had gone through at the earliest possible moment. Now he called up again, and Steeger himself replied that Ringgold was on his way. He would not be very long.

Then Mr. Guelpa went back to the death-chamber. The officials had gone.

He took from his pocket the second page of Cumber's last message to the living. It was unsigned. It seemed quite as mad as the page he had left for the police and coroner. It was of no importance. Why had he kept it? Mere raving, but stay! Those scratches and dashes at the foot of the page. In his last moment—his mind already afire with death-terror—what had the coward written there? A desperate appeal? Or a cry for vengeance, rising above his sickening fear of demons and death. Mr. Guelpa set himself to figure out the marks. Plainly enough they were words—fragments—at last he put down in his note-book this:

“Look—Look—

Find it—Gener-Hist—

Secon Vol—212

212—

Fiend—”

Or was the last word find?

Mr. Guelpa's eyes went straight to the row of books. Once before something had attracted him—called to him from those shelves. An intuitional

whisper. And now? He heard it again. Louder. With eyes nearly closed he approached the books. When he came to them he waited. Then he stretched out his hand. Opening his eyes he saw that it rested upon Volume II of the *General History*.

Touching the book only at top and bottom—as before—he took it from the shelf. Page 212. He opened at it. It was a blank page, inserted in front of a new division of the work. Page 213, which faced it, bore not a mark upon its regularly printed surface.

From end to end Mr. Guelpa went through the volume—the formal lumber of a library—a book apparently unread; and there were no indications of pencil lines or marked words or letters. He had drawn a blank—blank as page 212.

He opened once more that page and scanned it in a clear daylight streaming now into the window. Nothing! Then he tilted it and glanced sidewise along the page.

A ghost looked out at him.

So faint he saw only here and there a shadowy difference in the surface of the paper. It was as though something had lain there—matter upon matter—and left a vague memory behind it.

“Nothing is ever lost,” he whispered, “nothing is ever obliterated.”

Something he knew had lain there, confiding its secret to that unstained page. Why had Cumber, in

the passion of approaching death, declared it was there?

Because he had put it there.

What? His denunciation? His vengeance?

And had some one unknown to him stolen his vengeance away? Yes, that must be it. But what had it confided to the blank page, besides a few faint indications of darkness. The eternal confidence given by matter to the matter it touches.

It was there Cumber had hidden his "vengeance"—that proof of some dark crime, the knowledge of which was perhaps his protection, as well as his vengeance. That is why he had kept it (as he thought) ready to hand. Not on his person, whence it might be stolen from him; but concealed in one of dozens of books, beyond discovery, yet always at hand.

Who had stolen it?

Some one whom it would incriminate.

Mrs. Benton when she had taken refuge in the house? Had she known of its hiding-place? Was that why she came? Had she found it?

What did it matter? Its ghost lay there on the white page; an unseen ghost, that had been driven in (perhaps by the slow pressure of the volume to right and left of it) to the white depths of the blank page. It could be summoned and it would come forth again—to denounce and avenge.

Mr. Guelpa had performed greater miracles in his business of making matter cry aloud its secret.

The authorities, he found when he went below stairs, had—as he thought—all departed. Only the big policeman remained. He was keeping his watch in the kitchen where Amanda had set out a meal for him. He ate and then smoked, listening to her gossip of the household—of the surly Cumber, of this and that. The policeman listened idly. He was wondering why Amanda had never married and she such a good cook.

Mr. Guelpa had word with Grogan who was buttoning himself in his overcoat in the front hall.

"Grogan," he said, "there has been no reason for watching this house very strictly for some days. The main thing was that you and Lear should be on all. But to-night I want you to put on extra men."

"I get you," returned Grogan.

"A tight watch. After dark especially. Admit every one. Let no one go out without my personal consent."

"You're on, sir, I'll get some good men out here. You may trust us."

"Are you expecting any one in particular?"

"Every one and no one. They will take the body away?"

"Sure. They'll make the most of the autopsy—autopsy and witnesses and all the rest to-morrow. It will be an interesting day in this small town."

"But when will they remove the body?"

"In a few hours, I suppose. This is not a speedy burgh, see?"

Mr. Guelpa saw.

He went up to his own suite. Mrs. Ledsky was there in Julie's room, and his wife. Gently he explained to Mrs. Ledsky that he knew her guests were a heavy burden on her in this hour of darkness. Mrs. Guelpa and Julie must go to town at once. He had already telephoned Paul Dupuis and he would take them in.

"Get your things together, dear," he said to his wife.

Mrs. Ledsky protested feebly. No, she could not be left alone.

"But I shall be here," Mr. Guelpa promised, "and your husband will arrive in a few hours. You will not be alone. And you must rest—this tragedy has broken you. You must take something to steady yourself. When the professor arrives he will know what to do for you."

Mr. Guelpa was soothing, comforting, inexorable. Mrs. Ledsky went to her room and Julie made her lie down.

Soon Paul Dupuis came in a limousine. The luggage was piled on it, Mrs. Guelpa and Julie entered, and Paul, sitting between them, rose to heights of diplomacy, as the car went cityward, for though he snuggled close to Julie it was to Mrs. Guelpa that he talked—he showed himself to her, he wooed her, as one woos no other woman save the mother of the girl he loves.

Mr. Guelpa was in the living-room waiting. In

his hand he held the blank page he had deftly cut out of Volume II of the *General History*, page 212. He found a large envelope in the old-fashioned escriptorire and slipped the page in unfolded. His thoughts went to the laboratory, with its wonderful photographic outfit—for microphotography, for enlarged photography, the macro, for refracted light. But that must wait. He laid the enveloped blank sheet away in his wide inner pocket. When the door-bell rang he knew it was Ringgold. He was not alone; with him was a lean fellow, dressed in a bright summery way which spoke of southern California.

"This is Mr. Cross, sir," Ringgold said, "the man from Los Angeles. I thought you would not mind if I brought him out."

"I remember. It was for the identification of Mrs. Benton, yes."

"At least he knew her," Ringgold went on, "as I knew her—as Mrs. Forsythe."

"Come up-stairs. I will show you the photograph Miss Glenn lent me of the Bentons."

"I have told him about Cumber's death," Ringgold confided to Mr. Guelpa as they mounted the stairs.

"H'm. Well, why not?" Mr. Guelpa replied.

He showed the men into his room and took the snap-shot from an envelope.

"You recognize this woman?"

"Sure. It's the lady. A little age on her," Mr. Cross said, "but I'd know that doleful face any-

where—the droopy look of her and—say! That man? I saw him out there, too. With her. I'll recognize him all right."

"Mr. Ringgold has not told you? No? That is a man named Peter Barling—so he was known in your California. Here he posed as Richard Benton. He was married to this Mrs. Benton, as far as a marriage certificate could make him. He died under suspicious circumstances. And was cremated."

"Same game," observed the man from Los Angeles, "in both cases they took mighty good care to get the late lamented speedily cremated. I guess why the first time."

"Yes, I dare say you do," Mr. Guelpa explained; "in each case I think the plan was to get some one—in the first instance Forsythe, in the second Benton—to play the rôle of husband, perhaps on the understanding that they were merely to pretend to illness and, at the last moment a corpse was to be substituted. So they thought. Otherwise why should they have lent themselves to the scheme? But there was a deeper villain behind them. *They died*—and Mrs. Benton, that woman, was with them when they died."

"Some foxy game," admitted Cross, "and this Cumber? He was in it you think? I wonder if he ever hit our town when the gang pulled off the Forsythe affair?"

"The body has not yet been taken away. It is on the floor above. Would you like to see it?"

The men went up the enclosed staircase to the upper floor and entered the dead man's room. The eyes had not been closed. The head lay on the pillow. When Cross saw it he went close to the bed and then backed away:

"My God!" he exclaimed, "that ain't Cumber. That's Forsythe! He's the man they cremated out in Los Angeles.

"That man has been dead for five years!"

CHAPTER XVII

THROWN TO THE WOLVES

PROFESSOR LEDSKY bore the shock of his assistant's suicide with more fortitude than Mr. Guelpa had expected. Indeed, it almost seemed he took it with a sense of relief. In that painful journey homeward he had had time for reflection, Mr. Guepla decided, and could no longer shut his eyes to Cumber's connection with the Benton case—why, the fellow's very suicide was a confession of guilt; and the professor must feel that this death had lifted the shadow that lay upon his home.

These thoughts were in Mr. Guelpa's mind as he worked in the famous laboratory trying to evoke the ghost of the page 212—this piece of blank paper.

With his usual reticence with regard to uncompleted tasks he had not yet spoken of it to his host, and the professor himself had been occupied with the village formalities attendant upon the coroner's investigation and the funeral of the man who had been friend, servant and disciple.

Undisturbed Mr. Guelpa was at his task in the laboratory.

Before commencing he had drunk a libation—
 in distilled water, which was all he had there—to
 the *manes* of Vogel, long dead. It was genera-
 tions ago that the obscure photographer of Berlin
 had given Mr. Guelpa his “tip.” One day in that
 long ago a pretty woman had come to be photo-
 graphed. Clear of skin, bright of eye, she showed
 to the camera a face of beauty and went her way.
 When Vogel developed the plate there looked up at
 him a face maculated with spots on the forehead
 and cheeks. A defective plate? He wrote and
 asked her to come for another sitting a few days
 later. It was many weeks before she came and
 then he saw that the face, formerly so beautiful
 with its fresh untainted skin, was now ravaged and
 pitted by smallpox.

The camera had seen and recorded an eruption
 as yet invisible to the naked eye.

Then what could not the camera see?

Mr. Guelpa’s investigations had led him far be-
 yond that accidental discovery of the little photog-
 rapher. He applied it to his criminal investiga-
 tions. It was he who brought to light the forgery
 of the Dwight will in London, where the true date
 had been carefully eliminated and a date of a more
 recent year written in. The other experts had
 failed. They had trusted to the text-book theory
 that a scratched-out word may be brought up again
 under the influence of tannin or the yellow sulphur
 of ammonium. These are no magic drugs; they

can reawaken only the traces of iron, if by chance iron was in the ink. They have no magic to force out the secret of blue ink, of purple or red. It was Mr. Guelpa who discovered that the vanished word written in these inks would come to the surface when summoned by the microspectroscope. Whereby justice was done to the Dwight heiress and a forger went away from the court-room with handcuffs on his wrists.

And then that blank scrap of papyrus. He and Gross of Athens had worked the miracle of making it give up part of its record—its secret—lost a thousand years. They had used the Burinsky plates, chromoliths, sensitized with iodure of silver; and, here a little, there a little, the buried idiograms had emerged from the unmarked papyrus. A victory? No, merely a step on the road, which was to prove the Guelpa theory that matter, when it touches matter, leaves a record, faint it may be but unfailing. He was on the road.

But could he make this blank sheet of paper, showing hardly more than a hint, reveal the mystery of its companionship in Volume II of the *General History*—with what?

A letter that had lain against it?

That had been hidden there?

The letter, if such it was, must have been old and ink-dry when it was placed there, for no hint of blotted ink was discernible. The page was

white, save for the shadow of a faint line or two. Then it had lain there, Mr. Guelpa argued, a long time—pressed in the book—if indeed the white page had really stolen the ghost of the writing.

He was at his task; slow and patient, carrying on, repeating, going back, he photographed again and again—a long series of successive photographs. First he took a negative of the white page; nothing; he developed it and from the positive of this first proof he took a negative; and then he took a negative from the positive of the second proof; and so on. Nothing.

But the little man's patience was unbroken. In fact with every failure to get a result his interest kindled.

When the seventh proof was printed faint traces of words appeared.

Mr. Guelpa chuckled with self-approbation. Now he knew. On that blank page the ink-dried document laid against it had reproduced itself. The ghost of the dead ink had crept slowly into the white paper. What matter that the original letter had been stolen, destroyed? Here, word by word, it was emerging from invisibility—revealing—what? The mystery of the Benton case? Proclaiming, denouncing—whom? The Benton woman—Peter Barling, Cumber himself, the man who had sought refuge in suicide? A confession, perhaps, but of what?

The answer must wait. The process was long

and slow. So far his work was to any other than himself quite meaningless. He covered it with a cloth and went into the house, for he had heard Professor Ledsky return from the village.

They sat together in the living-room. The professor had ceased to defend Cumber, though he still seemed to feel for the fellow. The evidence had piled up too high; and he admitted that Cumber, if not the ring-leader of the two crimes, East and West, was at least a deep accomplice.

"And what I thought of him! You do not know how I trusted him, Mr. Guelpa, and to bring his vile crimes into my very house!"

"Yes, and that unfortunate Peter Barling."

"There, too! Of course I have long known he was a waster and a rogue. For my wife's sake I did what I could. I paid and paid to keep him out of desperate situations. He went through every penny of my poor wife's fortune, except a little I was able to rescue. I invested it for her in this property. Of course it has greatly increased in value and is clear of all incumbrance. That much I saved for her, or he would have had it. A brother, you see! She couldn't break her love for him. Women are difficult to understand—sisters. But at last I had to kick him out and forbid him the house. He went west and I thought we were free. And now it seems he has been here for a year—deep in another infamous crime—under the name of Benton. Thank God he is dead."

Professor Ledsky had spoken quickly, with vehemence, tapping with nervous fingers some rhythm on the arm of his chair.

"I wonder," Mr. Guelpa mused.

He seemed to be plunged in retrospection. Or he might have been wondering what tune the vibrant man opposite him was tapping out on the arm of the chair. He knew something about that. He had studied it—this subconscious reflex. He was convinced that when a man hums a tune, he selects subconsciously a song—words, an air—that reflects his state of mind, the hidden emotion. He listened to the tapping. Suddenly he leaned forward, speaking with hesitation, with quiet sympathy, to this friend and compeer in science who was in such distress.

"Yes, Professor, women are loyal," he began, "especially such a woman as your wife. Are you quite sure she did not help him when she could, even in spite of your wish in the matter, and without your knowledge?"

"I can not believe it. She would not have deceived me. She knew what we had suffered from the fellow."

"But she was always his sister, Professor."

"Yes, but I am her husband. She would not!" Professor Ledsky exclaimed vehemently.

"And yet could you greatly blame her?" Mr. Guelpa persisted, "if her sense of duty, if not her affection, her pity, led her to cling to this outcast

brother—even in defiance of the husband's wishes? Many women are self-sacrificial. And I think Mrs. Ledsky is a woman like that."

"You think she knew Barling was in New York? That she—"

Professor Ledsky stopped short and fixed his black burning eyes on the little man.

"Please tell me frankly what you are driving at, Mr. Guelpa!" he entreated.

"Pardon me if I distress you," Mr. Guelpa replied apologetically, "but the truth is I have reason to think that Mrs. Ledsky was in frequent communion with her brother—and with Mrs. Benton. Please—permit me to finish! I believe she visited their house in New York. More than once. Many times."

Professor Ledsky's nerves were jerking at him. He leaped from his chair and went pacing the floor, wheeling swiftly and then coming back again.

"My wife—mine! Deceived me—to help that swine of a brother! I will not believe it!"

Mr. Guelpa rose also; he was quite calm. He met the hot black eyes of the unhappy husband. He knew he must go on. But for a while there was silence between them, as though they were playing deadly rôles in a mute, unspoken drama. Their eyes challenged each other. Ledsky's eyes blazed intensely as though he were trying to plumb the steady little eyes that peered at him through glimmering glasses.

"What is it? Of what do you accuse my wife?"

Professor Ledsky had spoken first.

"Will you, pray, take your chair, Professor?"

Mr. Guelpa asked gently. "I shall tell you as much as I can—the time has come when I must take you into my confidence."

They sat down again and the professor tried to recapture his self-control, his hands gripped at each other, rolled and twisted.

"I do not accuse your wife of anything," Mr. Guelpa said, "except of having visited—unknown to you, who would have opposed it—visited her brother, the man known as Benton, who was killed for the insurance money in that house in New York."

"Perhaps you wish to intimate that she was aware of the infamous crime that was being carried out; is it that?"

"No, Professor, not necessarily, but what will not a self-sacrificing woman do for the brother she loves? But I can not proceed in the investigation of this case without letting you see where it is leading me. I must tell you. And my opinion—my deduction or what you please—is that Mrs. Ledsky, however innocently, is involved in this series of crimes."

"Involved!"

"I would advise you to get her to confide in you. Then perhaps I can be of assistance to her. Her visits to her brother, during his last illness, mark

you, will soon be known to others than myself. It is too late for her to try to shield any one. Unless she confides to you the entire truth she may be caught in the net that will—I assure you—gather up all the conspirators whom death has not saved. Her brother is dead—Cumber is dead—”

“She hated Cumber. It is impossible she should have been involved with him.”

“Did she hate him because he, with the Benton woman, killed her brother? It may be. Or for many other reasons. I believe Barling was persuaded that while he was to play the part of a dying man, a corpse was to be substituted at the last moment as it had been in the other swindle. Barling was involved in that affair and that is the way it was brought off. But in this case it is my opinion that Barling was doomed from the start. He was not meant to escape—as Cumber, the husband in the Forsythe case, did. No, the conspirators thought Barling was not to be trusted this time—or they feared his greed for the money—anyway, he died. You see he did have to die to win. Poor devil, when he talked to the nurse of cremation it was to prepare the way for his substitute—”

“A thing impossible in New York,” interposed the professor.

“Yes, so that is one of the reasons why they did not take the chance. They succeeded in Los Angeles. But that was five years ago. Things must have changed, new regulations come into effect,

umber, too, was a medical student at that time, I am informed. I think you, yourself, mentioned it. We must have had unusual opportunities for procuring a dead body—even if a corpse was really cremated there and not a dummy.”

“But my wife—involved, you say, in this horror—”

“I do not affirm it, Professor, I think it possible, that is all. And should it be so it would be so much better for her to confide in us,” Mr. Guelton said; in his long and varied career no task had ever been so little to his taste. “Indeed it might have the day even now if both of you were to confide in me.”

“You say both of us! Do you think I know anything of this damnable business? I?”

“Would you not shield your young wife? I should, in that event, admire your loyalty to her. I respect your silence, Professor Ledsky. But your silence can no longer be of service to her. It is too late. *Hear me. She can never make clear her innocence until she produces her brother’s wife—Mrs. Guelton—*”

“Good God! You accuse her of concealing this woman!”

“Who else could have received her in this house? Cumber? But Mrs. Ledsky and Cumber were together in this. Professor Ledsky, there is only one way in which I can help your wife. You must force her to tell me the truth.”

"If she knows! If she knew!" the professor cried, his face distorted with anguish. "If they had trapped her— My God! what are you asking me?"

"For the truth—"

"You mean I must throw her to the wolves! Throw her to the wolves! My God! My God!"

He flung himself out of the room, staggering, tossing his lean arms up.

And Mr. Guelpa sat very still. Only a quick intake of breath showed the emotion this outburst had caused within him. At last he murmured:

"*Tiens! tiens!* I might have known. His loyalty will keep him silent—but he knows—he knows—"

At that moment Mrs. Ledsky rose from a chair in the far corner of the room. Mr. Guelpa stared at her in speechless consternation. She approached him slowly, and stood with folded hands looking down on him where he sat.

"I was there," she murmured in a low voice pointing toward the lower end of the long living room where there was a second door from the hall.

"I heard you."

"You heard—"

"Everything."

Her voice was apparently calm; there was a scarf dangling from her arm. She tossed it aside and sat down in the chair her husband had occupied. She was very pale and a great wave of sympathy for her went through Mr. Guelpa.

He could picture her coming down the stairs, pausing, on the point of glancing into the room and giving them a gentle greeting—a smile; thus, all unprepared, she had listened to the grave accusation he had launched against her, and heard her husband's wild cry of despair—“Thrown to the wolves! Thrown to the wolves!”

Mr. Guelpa leaned forward in his chair and faced her.

“It was perhaps all for the best, Mrs. Ledsky,” he said gently. “I am glad you overheard us.”

Steady, but cold—holding herself well in hand, she replied: “I must know everything now.”

“You are very brave and I will tell you everything, at least everything you have not already heard. That I need not repeat.”

“No, you said I had defied my husband and visited Peter—and that woman! Mr. Guelpa, I give you my word of honor, I have not seen my brother for years. I did not see him there in New York. I never entered his house. I never saw this woman, Mrs. Benton, who says she was his wife. I had no dealings with Cumber. I did nothing unknown to my husband. I had no knowledge of this awful crime in which my brother was involved and in which he—perished. Do you believe me?”

Her steadiness was that of truth itself. And while her gaiety was gone her charm was unabated—it lurked in the beautiful eyes and the young mouth—the winsomeness of her—

"How can I say I do not believe you!" Mr. Guelpa pleaded. "But will your word of honor satisfy any one else?"

"You do not believe me?" she exclaimed, and the pain and consternation in her voice hurt him. But he gave no sign of it.

"Mrs. Ledsky," he said gravely, "the spoken word is nothing in the face of facts. And the facts demonstrate that you are guilty of every one of the things you have denied—upon your honor."

Her self-control matched his own.

"I have told the truth. I was never in that house. You do not believe me? You do not think others will believe me." Her voice grew bitter. "Can you prove my guilt?"

"I can prove it, yes," he declared, "*if you are guilty*. If you did not visit that house of crime, well, that, too, I can prove."

"Then you must—you must do it—"

"With your assistance, Mrs. Ledsky, I can do it. Not without."

"But I know nothing about the affair. I have told you again and again."

"Mrs. Ledsky, you say you did not visit your brother's house? No. Well, some one left traces there—decisive records of a woman who came and went time and again, who tarried there—who bathed there—dressed there, slept there—"

"But it was not I. You are mad."

"Will you help me prove that I am mad?"

"What can I do?"

"Come with me to your husband's laboratory. You know he has been good enough to let me use it as I will. Will you come with me and accept a test. The tests that never lie?"

"I will go anywhere, submit to anything, for—I do not understand these things—but no test can prove anything that is not true, can it?"

"No, they speak the truth."

"Come then, the truth is all I want. It is my right. I will submit to every test your science can make. And then," she stood up quickly and snatched at the scarf, "you will take back what you have said. And my husband, too," she added proudly.

"Now?"

"At once."

"You will remember we are working together—you to help me and I, believe me, I shall hope—"

They went to the laboratory side by side in silence. Professor Ledsky was not there. He had seemingly fled elsewhere, it may be to the refuge of his bedroom, to struggle with his despair.

"It is really very simple," Mr Guelpa explained talkatively, trying to lessen the strain that held her steady but suffering; "first just the finger-prints. You know all about that. It is remarkable, is it not," he went on, busy with his preparations, "that three months before a baby is born it bears on its little hands the lines, the identical grouping of the

pores it will carry on unchanged into old age—and death. Age does not change them nor the mutilations of hard work; and if you burn the skin away it will come back with the same marks, those the unborn baby had before its little hands clutched at life. Eh! Eh! and never are those marks the same on any two human beings.”

She did not seem to be listening, she paid no heed to his deft manipulation of the plates and receivers—he used the simple Turin method as he had not, of course, his own instruments at hand.

“Just the fingers, please—so. Just a poroscopic map of the tiny channels that reach the glands hidden in the *dermis*. You see? How quickly it is done.”

Mr. Guelpa did not look at her; apparently he was interested only in his manipulation of the finger-prints.

“*Parfait!*” he exclaimed at last. “Will you look at them? Those I took from a book I found in Mrs. Benton’s bedroom. A book of verse. It was a new book and had only one set of finger-prints. And it will not take me long to bring the others—yours—to life.”

“And if they are alike—?”

“Not alike, but the same,” Mr. Guelpa interposed quickly. “It will mean that the woman who handled that book so often was not Mrs. Benton—it was you. Will you look? Will you compare them?”

Mrs. Ledsky stood quite near the table, but she did not glance down at what Mr. Guelpa had placed there.

"Here is the book, Mrs. Ledsky. Do you recognize it? Did you leave it in your brother's house—by chance? Or did you give it to Mrs. Benton?"

"I have told you I was never in that house! Never saw that woman! And I have never seen that book before." She flushed with anger at his persistence, it would seem, and added: "Those things—those finger-prints—are they the same?"

"I am not quite prepared to say just yet. We are only beginning, Mrs. Ledsky, beginning," he replied preoccupied, busy over the table, indifferent to her question, "and may I ask one thing more—to step on this plate, it will not soil, and then on this square of paper?"

"Anything you please."

"It is to help us both—that I may help you. I am so sorry, but I shall have to ask you to take off your shoe and stocking. The right one, please."

"That!"

In spite of her flushing anger and embarrassment she did as he requested—this little man who chattered and persisted—and smiled with pathetic friendliness; but what was under the friendliness? Suddenly she began to fear him, because she could not read what lay under his smile. He turned

toward her, as she took a limping step or two, one foot bare.

"Thank you, step on that, just for an instant." He had a chair ready for her, and she sank into it. He went back to the table. She saw his head bent over his work, the small old hands moving like little animals, to and fro.

He took a long time to it. He talked, as if to himself: "Feet as individual as the hands. Their marks never change. And that, too, is true for animal as well as for human. I have taken the foot-prints of big dogs, of wolves, of cats—ah! ah! the poroscope identifies them—the interlaced crests—defined never the same in two dogs or two apes, or two men—wonderful! Nature marks its own. Eh?"

He swung round to her, sitting motionless in her chair.

"Now that is done, Mrs. Ledsky," he exclaimed brightly, "our task is getting on—getting on—Do you know that some woman in the Narrow House, coming hastily from the bathroom set a naked foot upon the edge of the parquet floor? It was recent—only a few hours old—when I arrived. The moisture had evaporated and left—this! Her imprint, which means—her declaration of identity. We are getting on—I told you—"

"Then you have found the truth? You know I spoke the truth—and nothing else. Answer me, Mr. Guelpa!" she cried imperatively.

"Soon. We must make sure, you know, Mrs. Ledsky. Often it is harder to prove innocence than guilt. We shall leave all this for the present. You will aid me once more?"

"I will do anything to prove that I know nothing about this awful affair! To disprove that terrible accusation—oh, you, are you really my friend, Mr. Guelpa? You are helping me?"

"Yes, I am helping you—all of us—to find the truth."

"And the truth shall set you free," she murmured, some old phrase from childhood echoing in her mind. Aloud she said: "I told you I would do anything. What is it?"

"A lock of your hair. 'Ah,'" exclaimed Mr. Guelpa, cocking his head, "that sounds as though I were a bad boy!"

She passed her hand over her hair—short, brown, sensuous hair that wandered and clustered in curls of its own making; absurd short curls, that coiled round the ears and neck.

"Well?"

With the scissors he gave her she cut off a small curl at the side.

"Ah, did you know, every hair of your head is numbered and the microscope reads the number," he asked brightly, "every hair—mine, too, but unfortunately my numbers are not many! Yes, every hair of this little curl!"

He laid it in the palm of his hand and somehow

or other it seemed to waken to life, curling round his finger as though clinging to him in a silent appeal for protection and help. So tightly it curled he had to detach it with some patience.

"I want to compare it with the combings of hair I found in the scrap-basket in the bedroom of the Narrow House. Combings I believe you call them."

He had indeed found a tangled bunch of hair in the basket; it lay near his hand, but after a quick inspection he thrust it out of sight. He had found that but he had also found another tangle of hair—faded yellow combings—not like these.

"Come, please, see for yourself."

She came to his side, eagerness struggling beneath her calm.

"Not much alike, eh?" the little man exclaimed, showing her the tuft of sand-colored combings, lying now side by side with her soft curl on the table.

"It is not mine! Of course it is not mine! And that was your test! I don't think much of it."

"Yes. And you see it has failed, eh? There can be no comparison at all between your hair and this."

"Thank God! And the others? They will be finished soon and you will know?"

"Very soon, to-morrow morning—perhaps before—because I must leave you in the morning."

"I know they will tell the truth like this one! I was never in that house, Mr. Guelpa. May I go?" She was all urgency now. "I want to tell my hus-

band. He must know. For, oh, what did you make him believe of me?"

"Yes, please tell him. I should have told him of the tests myself, but since you will go to him—yes, that is better."

Mr. Guelpa opened the door for her and showed her out in his polite way, and came back to the table. For a long time he stared at the tests, though he really needed no time for study or reflection.

He already knew!

The poroscope prints of the fingers—those had been made in the book found in the Benton house; these were the ones he had just taken from Mrs. Ledsky's hand.

They were identical!

The same.

And that little naked foot, here in the laboratory and yonder in the house of crime and betrayal, had made its imprints.

They were identical.

The same.

And the brown tangle of hair he had hidden from her sight and the living curl from her head—his comparison had been rapid but convincing.
Sans erreur.

They were identical.

The same.

Unmistakable; she had combed her soft brown hair in front of the mirror in that bedroom in the Benton house and tossed the combings in the basket.

Why had she consented to his tests?

She must have known they would betray her!

Why had she come with him to face them, so readily, so childishly compliant?

And then his thoughts went to Professor Ledsky, the illustrious man who had won his admiration years ago by his achievements in the highest branch of the science of life—life itself—and in whom, meeting him, he had found a friend. And this man, already broken, would be loyal to the woman to the end. Oh, this poor great friend—his brother in science—whom he must wound, crucify, for sake of the truth to which both had bound themselves, as with vows.

He went to the shelf where the successive series of photographs, oscillating from negative to positive and back again, were surely bringing forth the ghost—the ghost of that dead document. What? Cumber's confession? His denunciation of her?

Line upon shadowy line it was gradually coming forth. Soon, it would speak.

"I will make you shout aloud," the little man whispered to the scrap of paper.

Then slowly he returned to the square table. Carefully he put away the apparatus of his tests and his records of them. Last of all he picked up the little brown curl. A few moments ago it had lain against her face. Now it lay in his hand—more terrible than a weapon of steel against her.

Again it curled round his finger, gropingly, as though clinging to him with its mute helpless appeal.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTURED

“**I**M GLAD that’s over,” said Grogan.

“Me, too,” echoed Tim Lear.

It was the forenoon of the following day, bright with sunshine. They had come up from the village for a last look at the stone house they had been watching, with more or less zeal, for a fortnight. They had been acting on Steeger’s instructions, whose theory seemed to be that the fugitive Mrs. Benton might try to communicate with Cumber; but now that her accomplice was dead, he had called them off, although Mr. Guelpa has suggested a closer guard than before. And acting upon his instructions they had redoubled it. However, word had come from New York that they were to return. They had not made a success of the job anyway. In the first instance they had let Mrs. Benton get away; in the second they had been foxed by Mr. Guelpa; and by way of climax to their misadventures they had carted off a long-haired lover for trying to hide some snap-shots in the hollow of an old tree. It had not been work that would get them far.

"Are you goin' in, Tim?"

"Sure. You an' me. The boss said to tell the little Frenchman we were off the lay."

"I don't like the way he grins," muttered Grogan, "and he don't hate himself. Well, come on. Get it over."

"Right, y'are."

They crossed the road, entered the gate and took the path to the front door.

At that moment, from the side of the house, a woman came—the shadow of the crooked tree fell across her.

The men halted instinctively, and watched.

The woman looked round uncertainly, hesitated, and then came directly toward them.

It was Mrs. Benton.

There was not the slightest doubt of it.

Lear knew; Grogan knew; this was the woman who had come from the Narrow House and led them that long chase in the night, through the great city, and out the Westchester Road. Precisely as she looked then she looked now. She had made no attempt at disguise. As she was dressed then she was dressed now. And she did not try to elude them. Evidently she had seen them as she turned the corner of the house and realized the hopelessness of flight. Slowly, now, but resolutely she advanced to face them, where they stood, barring her way to the open gate.

Lear leaped and caught her by the arm. Grogan

was in front of her. She made not the slightest resistance, save that she seemed to shudder away from Lear's savage grip of her arm.

Grogan's momentary amazement left him; he laughed and said he would be damned.

"It's her, all right," chuckled Lear, "and the little Frenchman was wise when he ordered us to double the guard. Now just see how near Steeger came to a lose-out. Five minutes more and she'd have been gone."

Mrs. Benton looked up at them inquiringly, but that was all. She said nothing. She had not changed. Her face was drawn with the old tragic look. Her fair hair was crowded down by the small hat. Her eyes were half closed as though to shut out the light that flickered back from the snow. Quietly, with her free hand, she drew her veil sideways across her face.

"We're sure glad to see you, Mrs. Benton," Grogan said, tapping her shoulder. "Where were you going so fast? Come across, little one!"

At last she spoke; she was dull and apathetic, as though she had come inevitably, now, to a hopeless end.

"It does not matter," she murmured, "I will go with you—anywhere you please."

"You got that right the first time, lady," Lear remarked, and to Grogan he said: "Go in and tip off the professor—take the back way. He's been waitin' long enough for us to pick up this bird."

While Grogan went on his errand Lear questioned Mrs. Benton again.

Had she been in the house all the time? Had she just come? She did not answer.

"Well," said Lear, "I bet the folks will be glad to see you—especially the little Frenchman."

Still Mrs. Benton was silent. She stood with bent head, indifferent, letting his many sneering questions go by unchallenged. It was as though she had not heard.

When the front door opened, however, she turned and looked up quickly—with a sudden strained expectancy—

It was Grogan who appeared.

"Both the professor and Mrs. Ledsky motored up to town, the cook person says, but Mr. Guelpa is somewhere about," Grogan said, coming toward them, "and I've told her to find him. Want to bring her in?"

"Yep," replied Lear, "step out, lady."

He caught her elbow and pushed her toward the house.

"Please don't touch me," she said, hoarsely, "please—I will go with you anywhere, only don't—touch me!"

"All right, so long as you play fair and don't give us another run for our money. I'm no strong-arm guy," he replied, but his big hand was never far from her shoulder; after all women are women and you can't tell just which way they will jump;

and she was a bit too quiet to be real—this murder-lady.

They went into the living-room, where the embers of a fire were dying in the grate.

Mrs. Benton glanced curiously round the room, at the furniture, at the windows and doors. It was a look of inspection.

"Them windows are not made for a get-a-way, lady," Grogan interpreted her examination of the windows in his own way. "Just you sit down and be good."

It was then Mrs. Benton made her first independent move. She went direct to a couch in a dim corner; she had found the point of the least light.

"Please let me sit here," she begged, "the light outside has hurt my eyes."

"Not used to much light of late, eh? Sure! Sit where you like—if you don't mind my sitting next? Say! Where you bin hidin', anyway? Where's that black hole of yours?"

As though in weariness of soul and body that falls upon the fugitive when at last the chase is over, she sank back in the cushions and closed her eyes.

"I've seen 'em go to sleep," said Lear, watching her. "You remember Cocky Dane. When I finally got him an' he knew it was all over, but touching the button on him, he went to sleep like a baby—before he hit the floor of the cell. Queer the way it takes 'em."

"Where in hell has she bin hidin'—or did she just come back? Maybe she didn't know the Cumber man had beat it. Looking for him, perhaps. Well, git busy, Tim. Call up the office and tell 'em we've got the bird. An' we ain't so 'bad at that. That's what they sent us here for, wasn't it—so tell 'em we ain't so bad."

"Pity the professor isn't here. All right, I'll phone 'em."

But before Tim had taken four steps a voice came from the doorway.

"Tiens! tiens! tiens!"

It was Mr. Guelpa who spoke.

He came in, smiling in the way Grogan did not like, and threw off his coat and laid his little black hat on a chair. Then, light of foot, he went swiftly to the couch where the woman lay, passive, with half-closed eyes, her coat shrugged round her, as though she were cold as well as weary.

"Well, sir," remarked Lear, "we got her at last, all right."

"Tiens! tiens!"

"Five minutes more an' we'd have missed her. We've been called off, you know. We came to the house to report to you—and she was just breaking out."

"I congratulate you. It is Mrs. Benton. That was a good photograph of her I had, eh? So she was getting out of the house?" Mr. Guelpa, always studying the woman, remarked.

"Yes, sir. Just broke out and was makin' way as cool as you please."

"Mrs. Benton."

Mr. Guelpa bent over her. She paid no heed. He took her hand and felt her pulse. Then he did a strange thing. He said: "Permit me, Madame," and lifted the drooping eyelids and examined her eyes.

She forced them shut. "The light hurts me," she murmured.

"Yes, yes."

Mr. Guelpa turned to Grogan.

"Have you telephoned to your office? To Mr. Steeger, I mean. No? Well, please do so then and tell them you have found Mrs. Benton and that you have left her in my charge."

"I don't know, sir—"

"They will consent. I will be responsible for her. Professor Ledsky and his wife have gone to the city and on their return I wish them to see her."

It was Tim Lear who telephoned and there was silence until he returned: "It's all right, Grogan. We're to leave her in Mr. Guelpa's charge and beat it to the office."

"Thank you," Mr. Guelpa said, "I will be responsible. And she will not attempt to get away. You can see for yourself the woman is ill."

"She may be faking on you, sir, but orders is orders and it's up to you," and Lear shot a cynical

glance of suspicion at the woman they had captured after so long a follow-on, "though I'd sure like to see the bracelets on her after all the trouble she's given us. I've seen these feeble ones suddenly wake up—and something doing. You better keep your eyes open."

He went reluctantly, Grogan at his heels. A few moments later Mr. Guelpa heard their car, as it wheeled round from the gate and made for the town.

Left alone with Mrs. Benton, Mr. Guelpa stepped the full length of the room and then back again to the couch where she lay—unmoving, in a silence that seemed determined and self-protective; and that silence he meant to shatter. She must talk—she must answer—

And Mr. Guelpa knew she would speak. What? Full confession? The catharsis of a guilt-laden soul, urgent to rid itself of the burden? Or a cloud of words behind which the truth would rise dimly? She must speak openly. He was impatient for Professor Ledsky's return, that he might learn from her lips the whole infamy of this Cumber he had protected so long. He did not quite know how he should strike at her apathy and silence.

He was near the window, still reflecting, turning the problem over in his mind, when he heard heavy feet crunching the frozen snow.

Ledsky? No. It was too soon. He could

not be back for some hours yet. And then in a second he was at the front door. The big man he admitted to the hall was Doctor Hamilton, towering, aggressive, who thrust at him the question: "Have you any news of her? Mrs. Benton. You promised to call me up."

"And you grew tired of waiting, yes?" Mr. Guelpa's geniality enveloped the big bearded physician. "I had not forgotten. Come in. Come in."

"Am I intruding? There is some one?"

"Yes—there is some one—see for yourself."

One glance at the couch and Doctor Hamilton went forward.

"Mrs. Benton," and his heavy voice was shaken, "Mrs. Benton—thank God! You have found her, Mr. Guelpa. But what have you done to her?"

"Nothing. She was discovered like this in the garden a little while ago and brought in by the detectives."

"They hunted her down at last. But why here? Why was she here?"

"Ask her, Doctor."

Her eyes were open now; vague and staring they were fixed on nothingness. To Doctor Hamilton's hurried questions she paid no heed. He touched her hand.

"She is cold," he said.

He stripped off his heavy fur coat and laid it over her.

"Cold? She is more than that in my opinion, Doctor Hamilton. Not tired or weak—no. And she is not sleepy," Mr. Guelpa went on in a matter-of-fact way, "she is quite well—although I just told the detectives she was ill, to get them out of the way—but you see, Doctor, *this woman is hypnotized.*"

"What damned outrage have you been up to!" And the physician rose to his great height and towered there.

"Not I," protested Mr. Guelpa. "Come, you are a medical man. You must understand hypnosis. You must have seen this state many times even in the days when you walked the hospitals. I, at all events, have worked at hypnosis for a score of years—with abnormal patients in the Salpêtrière, with normal subjects and with criminals."

"Mrs. Benton—Mrs. Benton."

The woman looked up at the kindly face, a faint recognition in her eyes, but no words came.

"Come here a moment, Doctor Hamilton," and Mr. Guelpa led him to the window, away from the dim corner where Mrs. Benton lay, "you see for yourself."

"I can see it now, yes."

"What do you think?"

"I am puzzled. I have never seen her like this before—no, not like this."

"Unquestionably at this moment she is in a state of hypnosis." Mr. Guelpa continued, "I rec-

ognized it at once. But it is a very uncommon case and she is a very remarkable 'subject,' I should say. She reminds me of a patient Fontenoy had in Paris. He had her in this condition for months at a time—and no one the wiser as she went to and fro. She would accept uncritically the suggested idea and carry it out—the post-hypnotic suggestion, you understand. Of course the suggestion had to be renewed from time to time. I have the notes of that case, taken daily, if you would like to see them.”

For Doctor Hamilton this soft-voiced chatter was intolerable; he broke in upon it.

“Do you mean Mrs. Benton could have been in this state when I attended her husband—when I saw her day by day sitting near his bed—impossible!”

“Not quite in this same condition, Doctor,” explained Mr. Guelpa. “Something abnormal is happening to her now—even now. For an unexplained reason the hypnotic influence may be beginning to falter. Has the ingenuity of the hypnotizer failed? Has he died? Cumber is dead, eh? Suppose this mind that enslaved her mind had gone out? Eh, the master of her body and of the limp conquered soul within it? And now the grip loosens—slowly—and you, Doctor, did you ever really submit Mrs. Benton to an examination?”

“Strictly speaking, no. The night her husband died I prescribed for her, but I saw no indications of anything abnormal—nothing that might not have been due to emotional shock and fatigue.”

"Quite so."

"There was nothing perceptibly abnormal you mean. But of course you are not a specialist in this. I quite understand. Many physicians back away from it, though to-day it is in all your textbooks. But, Doctor Hamilton, when you were called—from time to time—to administer to your patient, *I believe his wife was always in a state of hypnosis.*"

"Always!"

"Yes. My point is you never saw her in any other way. To you, that condition appeared natural. Why not? No one could suspect it. And yet at times she puzzled you. I am right? Yes."

"The nurse feared she was taking drugs."

"Hypnotic drugs? Possibly. But I think not. There was behind her a deadlier power than that—the man who developed her as a hypnotic subject, until she was a tool—or weapon—in his hand."

"Benton? Or you said Cumber? Hell is too good for them—hell is too good!"

"Ah, but this! When he made her a subject he did not make her so for himself alone. I once thought that only he who had induced the hypnosis could control the subject. Indeed that was the general theory. But I have exploded it a dozen times."

"What can we do? For God's sake let us get on with what we have to do."

"Ah, that is difficult to decide. I wish Ledsky were here. I can of course, bring her back to her

normal state. But then? Suppose we should find that the last year—her life for all that period—is wiped out of her memory. Is that what we want?"

"For God's sake, yes!"

"It would be very unfortunate for her, Doctor. Remember the part she has played in that drama of crime, eh? What defense could be found for her—the widow in both insurance swindles. None. Now my way is this: Mrs. Benton shall speak, and she shall tell the truth. Are you afraid? She shall answer me as she would the fiend whose slave she was. Afraid, Doctor?"

"I am not afraid of anything she may reveal," and Hamilton threw up his head, "but—but what?" he asked himself.

He felt as though he had become entangled with the ghost of some one he did not know; as though he had given his sympathy and pity and the strange love that had risen in his heart, to some phantom of another woman; and that the unhappy Mrs. Benton he had known was to be forced to denounce herself—and then vanish into her real personality. The woman who had caught at his imagination—at his heart-strings—was to be plunged back into the half-explored realm of the subconscious—to die there. He would never see her, never know her again. Never hear her speak. And he would be a stranger to her. And who would come in her place? This other personality that had been driven under by this damned hypnotic power—

It was as though the woman he loved were to be murdered.

He had stood, giving no indication of the thoughts that were racing through his troubled mind. A light touch on his shoulder brought him back to the world of visible things:

"I am going to begin now, Doctor," Mr. Guelpa said softly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE UNPARDONABLE CRIME

THE two men approached the couch. Mr. Guelpa had lowered the shades and drawn the curtains. The room was almost dark.

"It is safer so," Mr. Guelpa explained. "Light is dangerous in such cases." It was noticeable he did not speak in a whisper—for a whisper carries far—but in a low flat voice that reached only the man he addressed. "I should like you to keep a finger on her pulse," he went on. "I have locked both doors. We shall be free from sudden interruption. Now."

Mrs. Benton had not moved. She lay, her cold indolent eyes fixed on something beyond. Mr. Guelpa moved the couch so that a chair might be placed on the other side for Doctor Hamilton. This gave the physician her right hand. He laid his broad sensitive fingers on her pulse. The beat was regular but not strong.

"Why, this is Mrs. Benton," Mr. Guelpa began; he spoke very distinctly in a voice of welcoming cheerfulness.

The woman did not move, save for the droop

of her eyelids. Then Mr. Guelpa pressed his thumb firmly against her forehead between the eyes:

"Look at me—open your eyes."

She seemed to hesitate, then she looked at him; in the dusk of the room her eyes glowed with a glassy bluish light.

"Who are you?" she asked; her voice was heavy, colorless.

"You do not know me?"

"No."

"You are under another control, but wait—look at me—"

She half rose as though pulled up by another memory. "Of course I know you. You were to come to me. I was told so, but you have no name. You are the man to whom I must respond."

"You were told—by him—your control, to answer me?"

"Yes. He said you would make everything right for me—that you would understand. And so I have been waiting—waiting—and now you are here. I am very glad."

Mr. Guelpa spoke across her to Doctor Hamilton:

"This is extraordinary. I do not understand it. But it is going to make everything much easier. And much safer. She is yielding to me willingly and with confidence."

"But it must be Cumber who is responsible for this," Hamilton said. "Ask her, try to find out."

She did not seem to hear the doctor's voice. Always her eyes were fixed on the little Frenchman, to whom she had been commanded to speak.

"And here is Doctor Hamilton? Your friend!" Mr. Guelpa said, always speaking with great distinctness. "See—and you are back in your own room, lying on the *chaise-longue*. If you look into the mirror above the mantel you can see yourself. Look around, Mrs. Benton!"

"My God!" she whispered staring about her uneasily, "you have sent me back there!"

It was an awesome whisper—the whisper of a mastered soul.

She turned toward the doctor; her face was drawn and white but it gave him a weary look of welcome, appeal, gentleness—just the look he had so often seen.

"I am so glad you have called, Doctor Hamilton, but I am quite well—only tired. Last night was a tiring night, I got very little sleep. Dear Doctor, dear friend, I am very glad—" She let her hand turn over into his, but Mr. Guelpa signaled to Hamilton to break the contact. Then for a moment he took both her hands in his. When he laid them down, folded in her lap, she gave a little sigh.

"Please," she begged, looking up, "please take me away from here—I don't want to be in this house. You know I came unwillingly—because I had to. Oh, won't you take me away?"

"Yes, I shall soon take you away," Mr. Guelpa promised, "and meanwhile you will not suffer at all. See! I am going to put you to sleep and when you awaken you will know no one but me. Sleep," he commanded softly, "sleep," again he pressed her forehead and let his fingers trail down over her eyes and face; then he snapped out the word sharply: "Sleep!"

"I am asleep."

"You hear me?"

"I hear you perfectly."

"When you wake you will know me. You will hear no voice but mine. You will obey no one but me. Listen attentively."

"I am listening."

"My name is Guelpa. That other power is gone. His control is broken. He can never influence you again. No one can ever influence you again. I am going to set you free."

"You say I must respond to you?"

"Yes. And now you sleep again."

"Yes, I am asleep."

"When I wake you—remember!—you are still Mrs. Benton. In the Narrow House. In your own bedroom. With me."

"I shall remember."

"Yes, and now I am going to wake you."

There was a little pause. Then Mr. Guelpa exclaimed:

"Wake!"

He blew on her face and clapped his hands together as he spoke the compelling word. She startled as though she had been shot. A suppressed moan broke from her lips:

"How is her pulse, Doctor?"

Hamilton touched it lightly:

"Fairly good."

"Mrs. Benton, you hear me?"

"Of course."

"You know me?"

"Certainly. You are Mr. Guelpa. Why, you have just been introduced to me. What a question to ask!" her deep heavy voice was sluggish, and her manner was unembarrassed. She sat up and ranged herself in a more conventional attitude against the cushions.

"You hear me, alone? The *other's* commands do not reach you. You have forgotten them."

"You alone, Mr. Guelpa."

"And the *other* who sent you here to the Narrow House so often. Who was he, Mrs. Benton?"

Without a moment's hesitation she answered: "My husband."

"Benton!" Hamilton exclaimed. "Benton—and it wasn't Cumber?"

His words passed over her unheard. She saw only the keen face and twinkling eyes of the little Frenchman and heard his voice alone.

"Your husband is dead." This from Mr. Guelpa.

"Is he?"

"You attended his funeral."

"Of course with my dear doctor—Doctor Hamilton was with me. How could I forget? And you know," she added confidentially, "coming home I saw *him*, passing in an automobile with another man. I was afraid—terribly afraid he was angry. I fainted, I think I did. I know I was afraid."

"What does she mean?" Hamilton asked. "Of course I was with her. But whom did she see?"

Mr. Guelpa nodded at him and put the question to Mrs. Benton:

"Whom did you see in the automobile? Was it Cumber?"

"Oh, yes, of course I saw Cumber! But I wasn't afraid of him."

"Are you sure it was your husband who hypnotized you?"

"Always my husband."

"But he was dead, Mrs. Benton, he was dead, when you saw the man in the car."

"Was he? I did not know."

"Then it was not Richard Benton, your husband, who hypnotized you, but the man in the car?"

"Yes. *He* was my husband."

"Come now, Mrs. Benton, we know Benton was your husband. We have seen the marriage-certificate."

"Oh, that was because I had to have it," she

spoke carelessly, "and I remember he was my husband, too. Not really, you know—not really my husband, at all. Of course he had to pretend to be, on account of the insurance. But when I saw *his* face in the car—my own husband's face in the car—I was terrified."

"I was with her," Hamilton explained, "she is speaking the truth. There were two men in the car. One was Cumber she says and the other—"

"What was the name of the other man in the car? Your real husband?"

"I was never told his name. I was Mrs. Benton," she glanced round the room, and reaffirmed it, "why, I am Mrs. Benton still. And there is the mirror."

On the blank wall she stared at, there was no mirror but she saw one.

"Was your husband Cumber?"

"No—I was Mrs. Benton."

"Was the name—Forsythe?"

"I do not know that name."

"When did you see your real husband last?"

"I remember!" It was as though she were telling him in confidence, "it was the night Richard Benton died. I stole out of the house and met him. He was waiting for me. I told him Benton was dead."

"Did he ever come to the house to see you?"

"Yes, often. In the night. To renew the influence—you know—for I always had to be held to it, or I should have become *myself*. Sometimes

"I am weak, though you wouldn't think it—after all these years."

"You see, Doctor, this unhappy woman was under hypnotic influence all the time you knew her. It is just as I thought. She is a pitiful victim and just as innocent of any wrong-doing as you are. Or as I am myself.

"Mrs. Benton," Guelpa pursued his inquiry, "Cumber came to your house, did he not?"

"Oh, yes, yes, he had to come."

"Why was Benton killed?"

"Was he killed?" She, who was living once more the woman who had been Richard Benton's wife, put the question with calm indifference. "Did they really kill him? I am so sorry. The truth is, he did not want to die."

"Did you administer the poison?"

"I? No, no, I nursed him. You must know that—I had to be his wife—not his real wife—but I was Mrs. Benton. *He* said so."

"Who gave him his medicine?"

"Nurse did, and—Cumber."

"You see, Mr. Guelpa," said Hamilton, "Cumber was the prime mover in the crime. I believe he was the *real* husband she spoke of. Only—he had to remove that thought from her mind while she was posing as Mrs. Benton."

"You think Cumber hypnotized her?"

"Yes, I do. He was capable of anything. And all the evidence goes to show he was constantly—"

though in secret—in the Narrow House. And he even attended Benton's funeral."

"How many mirrors are there in this room?" Mr. Guelpa asked suddenly. "Count them." There were no mirrors in the room.

"Why I can see three. I love them," she announced with a toss of laughter. "You know I look into them hour after hour until I go away into the sleep. It renews the influence."

"And you read a great deal?"

"Why, yes—but I was mostly in the sick-room."

Other questions, always the steady truthful answers. She said the nurse had not dressed or combed her hair in the room; the combings in the waste-basket were hers.

"Did you not have a lady visitor from time to time?" Mr. Guelpa asked.

"I do not remember."

"I mean Mr. Benton's sister. Did she not come to see him during his illness?"

"Had he a sister?"

"Yes. And I believe she was often with him in the Narrow House. Come now, try to remember. She was fond of reading. She read that book yonder"—and Mr. Guelpa pointed to an imaginary table—"that book of verse. She probably brought it with her when she came. And she sat before your dressing-table and combed her hair. She had short brown curly hair. She was very beautiful. And very kind. And she was devoted to her

brother. The reason you do not wish to answer my questions about her is because her visits had to be kept secret. You had been asked not to mention them to any one outside the house. But you know she came there. Now tell me why did you leave the room in such disorder and go away without taking any of your clothes?"

"Because I was taken away in such a hurry," she replied.

"Who took you?"

"Cumber."

"And your sister-in-law was not with you?"

"No."

"That surprises me, because she took a bath and stepped out on the parquet floor with her wet foot leaving its impression there, probably just before you were taken away from the house in such haste."

"I did not see her."

"Perhaps not. But she was there."

"I saw Cumber. He took me away."

"Always Cumber," Doctor Hamilton muttered "hell is not deep enough!"

"Where did Cumber take you?"

"A long journey."

"Listen. You are leaving this room. Hush. Quick. You must escape."

"Yes, quick!" She was caught up by the new insistent suggestion; once more she was flung from the Narrow House; first in a taxi, then a street-car, the trolley—and she followed blindly a route that

seemed to reopen before her. Cumber was with her. Yes. And the motor-car. It was waiting. He put her into it. And then the long ride through the darkness. Before they reached the house, Cumber jumped out of the car. He feared they had been followed. He told her to slip in through the back door. He had arranged that the servants would be both out of the house. No one would see her. She would be safe—safe— And it was true. She was safe and free of the Narrow House. A little ripple of laughter—hypnotic laughter—ended for her this wild flight through hours long since vanished.

"And now you are here," Mr. Guelpa told her sharply. "See—in the living-room of Professor Ledsky's house, with me."

"Of course. But I do not know that name."

She sank back; her eyes became expressionless.

"Have you been here all this time, Mrs. Benton?"

"Yes."

"Then you must know Professor Ledsky."

"No."

"But you know your sister-in-law, Mrs. Ledsky?"

"No."

"I can not understand these denials," whispered Mr. Guelpa to Doctor Hamilton. Then to her, he said: "But you married her brother?"

"Did I?"

"Yes, Benton was her brother, though he had another name. And it would be quite natural for his sister to hide you here, even if you were a fugitive from justice."

"No, no, no! You are wrong. I know no such person. Cumber brought me. I came with Cumber."

"Did he once take a photograph of you with Richard Benton—out in the garden by the crooked tree?"

"Of course. Cumber thought we might need it, and," she added craftily, "for the insurance people—man and wife. But we didn't. And I never was Benton's wife. How could I be when I was already married?"

"Did you know Benton's real name was Peter Barling—and that he was Mrs. Ledsky's brother?"

"No. Did I have to know that? They never told me." She moaned a little. "I am very tired. You hurt me!"

"Haven't you about finished?" Hamilton asked anxiously, touched by her appeal to the inexorable little man of science. "What have we learned anyway?"

"A great deal, Doctor—especially that Mrs. Benton is an innocent woman and that her innocence can be proved by our experiment to-day."

"Well, I thank God for that," returned Hamilton.

"Yes, and so do I," agreed Mr. Guelpa, "but

the inquiry is over now, though I am still puzzled by her denials regarding Mrs. Ledsky. I have absolute proof Barling's sister frequented the Narrow House during his illness."

"They kept them apart," said Hamilton, "that seems clear enough. A matter of precaution. Who knows—damn them!"

"Well, what I can positively affirm now," remarked Mr. Guelpa, "and prove, too—is that Mrs. Benton is a victim, who has carried out automatically a suggestion so strong and of such a prolonged period of time, that it has created a veritable 'second personality.' Dissociation of personality is common enough. Dynamic psychology has demonstrated it; and this division—this splitting off of the personality—can be brought about by the very suggestive or hypnotic sleep in which this poor woman has been thrust—ruthlessly, remorselessly,—"

"Damnably!" cried Doctor Hamilton.

"Yes—damnably! I agree with you."

"Her pulse is getting weaker," said Doctor Hamilton suddenly. "For God's sake wake her."

"All right. All right. There is no danger, Doctor."

The little man rose and stood bending over his "subject."

"Close your eyes, Mrs. Benton," he commanded. "So. You are asleep. Breathe deep. So—so—" he paused: "Are you asleep?"

"I—am—asleep."

"Now I shall waken you again. When you come back you shall be your *real* self. You will no longer be Mrs. Benton or any one else. You will be your own individual self. And you will keep it—you hear me?"

"I hear."

"You will forget all about Mrs. Benton and everything connected with her. You will forget all about the Narrow House and the man you thought you married. *You shall be yourself! Your real self!* You never knew Mrs. Benton. You will remember only your real self—not even a dream of the hypnotic world will remain in your consciousness. It can never never touch you again. When you wake you will find yourself with friends and you will be quite well, and strong and—happy."

Then Mr. Guelpa with infinite precaution proceeded to awaken his subject, Doctor Hamilton all the while watching her pulse.

Slowly she came back to herself; she came up out of the immeasurable depths of the subconscious world of suggestion—of sub-personal life. The primary self which alone possesses true individuality, will, self-control, emerged. As Mr. Guelpa had said, Bertha Benton changed and faded away. Even in the dim light of the room, the silent watchers could observe this phenomenon of the induced personality sinking forever into the fathomless depths of subconsciousness and the normal woman recreate herself and claim her birthright of individ-

uality. Her body, hitherto limp, stiffened suddenly and with a stark effort she literally *pulled herself out of herself*. Her eyes opened wide. The grayish pallor of the face changed to rose-glow. Tension ceased. With a long sigh of relief she relaxed.

Hamilton, who was now bending over her uttered a cry of alarm. He caught her up in his arms and bore her to the window. He raised the shade, threw open the window and let in the keen winter air. As he did so some sort of sand-colored head-piece fell away, dragging with it hat and veil, and out tumbled a curly mass of brown hair. She slipped from his arms to her feet, and stood—

Not the drab pitiful Bertha Benton, victim of man's evil knowledge and greed, hypnotized out of all semblance to herself.

What stood there was the dazed, wondering, radiant Eleanor Ledsky.

"My God!" Hamilton cried, starting back, shaken to his soul, "this is not Bertha Benton."

"No—and it never was," Mr. Guelpa said with his slow enigmatic smile.

"Then who—who—"

"The professor's wife, Mrs. Ledsky."

CHAPTER XX

THE GHOST LETTER

TWO streams of consciousness, one buried beneath the other—two selves, one on the surface, leading an automatic life, while the other lay deep within, sleeping—

Then suddenly the real Person rises, tramples upon the Dark Intruder, rises to the plane of conscious individuality—is—

So often Mr. Guelpa had seen this swift transformation as if some spring had been loosed in the ideo-motor mechanism of life!

But, for a moment, he knew, the physical body would be shaken, dazed, as the victim reclaimed and reconquered her self-hood.

Deftly he removed the veil and mop of sand-colored hair and rolled them into a bundle which he cast aside. They had contributed to the disguise of Mrs. Benton, though they had been the least part of it. Beneath, she wore one of the morning dresses Mr. Guelpa was familiar with. That could carry no suggestion except the right one.

The human personality is identified far less by outer appearance than by its habits and mental atti-

tude, Mr. Guelpa believed, and these, transformed, had more effectively disguised the woman than hair, coat and veil.

"Get rid of those things, Doctor," he said in a low voice. "Take them away with you. She must never see them again. There should be nothing to remind her of Mrs. Benton."

He guided Mrs. Ledsky to the couch and let her sink down upon it.

Again he spoke softly to Hamilton:

"For her, Mrs. Benton must have never existed—except as this unknown wife of her brother, Peter Barling. Remember this: she must never know the past or the part she played—unconsciously—in the tragedy of the Narrow House."

Mrs. Ledsky sat up, and looked at Mr. Guelpa with a little smile of perplexity.

"What is all this?" she inquired brightly, "more tests?"

"Oh, no, indeed, we are through with tests, my dear lady. They exonerated you fully. But I think you have had a spell of faintness. Do you feel all right, now?"

"I? Such a thing never happened to me before."

"It happened now," declared Mr. Guelpa. "Fortunately, my friend, Doctor Hamilton, chanced to call on me just as you were taken ill. You will permit me? Doctor Hamilton, Mrs. Ledsky."

"Then I must thank you," she said, addressing Hamilton and giving him her hand.

There was color now in her face; it seemed to the doctor that she had recovered her aptitude for happiness, so long buried under the mask of Mrs. Benton; her eyes looked up at him candidly. And looking down into them he realized a strange thing. Her eyes had not changed. They were the same. They would always be the same, for what shone forth from them was the soul of the real woman. A troubled soul, perhaps, for the soul of woman enshrines all the mystery of human destiny, but valiant; and probably its valor may save the world.

How rarely he had seen those eyes in the dim room where villainy lay dying, where she brooded, bent, apathetic, pitiful. He knew now that even then they had called to him from their depths of sadness. And he had heard. Now he understood whence had come that impulse to drag her out of that swamp of disintegration, of sickening odors and death. And now she was free. No longer a woman to pity.

God knows, he told himself, for few men is the miracle performed that they shall find their ideal in a woman! Oh, patiently they search for it and die, unassuaged. The rosy girl they thought was the ideal turns in their hands and shows the bleak face of disillusion. Not she, it is not she! That is the horror of human love.

But here—

The haggard dull-hued woman who crouched, tragic as blindness, in her awful trance by the bed

of a dying man, had risen—had flamed into beauty, youth, aliveness! The little head with clustering, curls—

The thought that she was the wife of another man, at first did not come to him, so compellingly he felt that she had but newly come to life; and for him. Ancient vibrations, old harmonies, were speaking—recalling, it may be, remote lives, lived out together, in the dim past.

Hamilton stood very erect, now, as though pulled up by tense emotion. He had hardly heard what Mr. Guelpa was saying to her.

Her voice, clear and fresh now, recalled him:

"Mr. Guelpa has been telling me you were my brother's physician," she said, thoughtful, a little puzzled, "and I can not express my gratitude for all you did for him. He—was most unfortunate—but he was my brother. He was all I had," and her voice broke a little. "His death under such tragic circumstances was a great shock to me."

"I did what I could," Doctor Hamilton answered gravely.

There was luncheon; then Mr. Guelpa excused himself; he had work to finish before he returned to town.

"And does the professor know you are leaving to-day?" Mrs. Ledsky asked.

"I shall telephone him," he replied.

He went out, leaving Eleanor Ledsky and Doctor Hamilton in the living-room. When he en-

tered the laboratory his nerves tingled as they had often done when he was on the edge of a discovery—as on that memorable day in the famous Dwight case; and they carried, too, the overhang of that tense hypnotic experiment he had forced upon the woman.

As he had said to Doctor Hamilton he had learned a great deal by the questions he had put to “Mrs. Benton”—but he had not learned all. Clearly she did not know the others responsible for Benton’s death. Names had been carefully withheld from her. What she did say cleared up many obscure points in the case. Her rascally brother had posed as her husband in New York. That was clear. And Cumber had been the “presumed husband”—Forsythe—in Los Angeles. And always Peter Barling stood between his sister and the other rogues concerned. He was constantly with her both in the Narrow House and in California. Cumber had merely acted the part of the husband of the hypnotized “Mrs. Forsythe.” Might not that in some intuitive way account for Mrs. Ledsky’s dislike of the man? For although no memory of the Forsythe case remained in her mind, she nevertheless seemed to read Cumber aright and disliked him accordingly. This was clear. But many other things were still shrouded in mystery. Mr. Guelpa now believed they were going to be solved; for what awaited him in the laboratory was that white sheet of paper, page 212 cut from Cumber’s book.

The photograph of it had unquestionably been driven from positive to negative—tossed from negative to positive—again and again, and little by little the sensitivised Burinsky plates had been dragging forth the secret buried deep in that blank page—the ghost of written words that had once cuddled against it confiding, recording; matter marking matter.

He set about completing his arrangement for the printing of the last plate.

“That will bring it,” he murmured, “and what will it tell me? The Great Crime.”

For Mr. Guelpa the great crime was not that conspiracy in which greed, craft and murder had planned to swindle an insurance company. It was a far greater crime, the crime against humanity—the human soul. And the ignominy of it was that this crime was almost the last-born of science. As yet it was a young power—for good or evil—fumbling, uncertain, which had plundered this woman’s soul. A great force—greater than electricity which can kill only the physical body. This was etheric, cosmic. For it was the etheric body which was involved, only science has not yet, Mr. Guelpa reasoned, arrived at any exact knowledge of this Second Principle of man.

A staring light held before the eyes, a word of command—a mere vibratory touch of the hand—and the shrinking ego is thrust out of the material into the immaterial. And with this force, uncal-

culated by science, the etheric body comes to the surface, emerges, separates—with its eternal record of things that once were and of all that will be—and all the while a material body is entranced, held in thrall, made to ape the gestures of physical life—wanton gestures of love and laughter or the tragic gestures of crime.

The Great Crime!

And who had been guilty of it?

It could be no other man than Cumber, Mr. Guelpa reflected, as that man's confession crept line by line over the Burinsky plate. He had been a medical student, a sort of doctor, easily acquiring the method and practise of hypnotism. In Mrs. Ledsky he found a natural *sensitive*. Her scoundrel of a brother aided him. The professor, in his absorbed life, his constant travel, his long absences from home could very well have been oblivious of what was taking place. Mrs. Ledsky had, herself, spoken of having been lured to California by Barling on a plea of illness. Her husband had been abroad at that time. The Forsythe swindle was the result. Yes, all unknown to herself she had enacted the part of the "widow," was paid the insurance money, and then, restored to normal consciousness, allowed to return to her home.

The Great Crime!

Something like this must have happened, but Mr. Guelpa was not quite sure. He was puzzled. Surely Professor Ledsky must have known his wife

spent some time with her brother in the Narrow House, without suspecting the use to which she was being put while there. Yes, that was what he concealed, out of loyalty to her and fear of her being entangled in the Benton scandal. Mr. Guelpa wondered just how much he knew and what he would say when he was made aware of the hideous truth.

The ghost of the letter would tell him.

From the first, Mr. Guelpa, alert to impressions of inanimate things, had been drawn to the book; Cumber had given him the key to the page; and intuitively he had felt that there the mystery lay hid.

Or a lie?

Men have gone out of life shouting the lie—"I am innocent!" Or "I accuse Jones, he did it, not I"—as often as they have moaned out the truth in a last confession. The mind of man, even when it lies dying, is mysterious as the death that comes to still it forever.

Mr. Guelpa was working over his final printing—the last one, he hoped.

Still puzzled, his mind kept reverting to the experiment with Mrs. Ledsky which he had conducted. He kept asking himself a question. It was a vital one. And try as he would he could find no answer for it. Granted that Cumber had been the hypnotizer of the unfortunate woman, aided and abetted by her brother; *who* had thrown her back into the personality of Mrs. Benton this very morn-

ing? Cumber was dead. His power had died with him. Then—suddenly Mr. Guelpa exclaimed: “*Tiens! tiens! the mirrors!*”

He recalled how Mrs. Benton had been told to stare into the various mirrors in the bedroom of the Narrow House to—as she explained—“strengthen the influence.” Now Mr. Guelpa knew self-hypnosis to be an established fact. He had seen subjects hypnotize themselves. This was probably what Mrs. Ledsky had done—she had automatically thrown herself back into the personality of Bertha Benton. It might even have been in a sense due to some final suggestion of Cumber—a post-hypnotic suggestion. Yes. It could have been that. It was possible.

This problem solved to his satisfaction, Mr. Guelpa again turned his attention to his print.

The compassion which knowledge of suffering crime-laden men and women had taught him—went to his friend, Professor Ledsky. What would it be to him—this stripping bare of the man he had nurtured and trusted, had almost created? He must be told.

Mr. Guelpa had come very close to this great man, brother in science, which binds like kinship. He had learned all about the professor's early struggles; born of humble parents in a poor village of Hungary, surmounting obscure birth and stifling environment, urged on by the force of a resistless will, breaking with the past, and then the strife in

a strange new country, fighting hunger, loneliness, but carrying on in spite of all. How had that restless brain, that high-keyed, will-driven nervous system maintained the normal balance?

And yet it had done so.

It had done so notwithstanding his tragic home-life. Married to so young a girl, blood-linked to a dissolute brother, whose influence over her had proved so disastrous; ah, what a life for such a man as Professor Ledsky to have led! And still he had toiled on.

"He will open his heart to me," Mr. Guelpa assured himself, "when the ghost has spoken."

It lay now, the last print, afloat in the fixative bath; then water.

He could not remember how long he had not been smoking. Daintily, with extreme care he rolled himself a cigarette and lighted it. At once he threw it down and ground it under his heel.

Something was wrong.

The very air was charged with intensity.

He stared at the revealing script. In places it was vague and faint, but he knew it could be read, deciphered, recorded. He held it in the light. Words flashed out at him—sinister words, violent—

His hand was not steady as he laid it flat on the table under the gleaming bulb of light. What words were they? Bent, with cheek down almost level with the table, he stared across the surface of the printed photograph. The words of the script

caught at one another, grouped into sentences. Legible. He sat up and reached for the magnifying-glass. Then, pencil in hand, he wrote word for word all he could decipher. Soon he saw each and every one would speak. His mind did not link them up. Resolutely he refused to let them give themselves a meaning. Word after word. Had he permitted his brain to cognize their significance his hand would have refused to write them down. An automaton, unthinking, he completed his task.

When he had finished he leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes.

He knew, without knowing, what the ghost had revealed.

And the knowledge overwhelmed him. His very soul was shaken with horror, revolt, pain. Indeed his predominant feeling at this moment was acute, actual pain. He suffered as one who receives a death-blow. He had received a death-blow. Something within him had been killed.

He rose impatiently, staring at the long room. He looked at the familiar objects it contained without seeing them. They no longer had any significance. It was as though that whole laboratory and all it contained had never been. Never could have been.

"I must think," he muttered, "I must think."

For the first time in his life the little man's brain refused to obey his will. He could not think. He could only feel.

"I must read it once more," he whispered.
"Dieu, mon Dieu!"

His will held. He took up the fatal message and read it through again, steadily.

What he read was this:

I, Ernest Cumber, denounce Hugo Ledsky as murderer and thief and demon. If he murders me these words will remain. All I have done he made me do. I have always been his victim since I met him. So has his wife. Do not listen to him. He is a strong demon and will fool you. Who but a devil would have experimented on his own wife—a young girl? Science—hell! I admit he had nothing to do with the Forsythe swindle. He was in Europe. I got in Barling's power. It was not murder, I swear. Ledsky got no money. Barling got it all. Ledsky—the professor! But the Benton plot was his—all his from start to finish. He did it all. He sent his wife there—kept her there under my eyes. Barling was blackmailing him and he saw a chance to kill him and get him out of the way. And then there was the money! He wouldn't have refused it. For his damned science. Professor Ledsky! I swear he did it all. He killed Barling. Small doses. Datura was the poison. The doctor diagnosed it acute angina. Hell! The game is up. We are all lost but Ledsky shall pay. I hide this in a book. You will find it. I shall make sure.

"Ernest Cumber."

It is quite true that never in his long career had Mr. Guelpa been so hard hit, as when he let this dull print—scrawled over with Cumber's denuncia-

tion—fall to the table, where it lay, curling in on itself. At first he could not believe it. And the reason was that heretofore his battles against crime had been clean-cut battles—science against crime. There was a very human side to the genial little man, but heretofore his sympathy had gone to the victim, not to the evil-doer. With Professor Ledsky it was different. His admiration had run in a full tide toward that great scientist, whose devotion to science—whose conquests, whose unselfish services—had raised him to the highest distinction and had indeed made of him a world-figure. He had met him; and intellect had caught at intellect and clung; for this vivid man, who radiated power, sympathy, Mr. Guelpa had developed a sincere friendship. It was one of those high friendships possible only between men whose minds meet in the same enthusiasm for truth—the intellectual friendship, which is stronger than the love of man for woman.

Could this madman's denunciation be true? Cumber, who blew his wild brains out, might have been insane.

But the facts!

That statement seemed to light up all the doubts and perplexities of the case. So much he had known, step after step had brought him nearer to his conclusion. He had accounted for the drama of the Narrow House. For "Mrs. Benton" posing as the wife of her wastrel brother. For her long state of hypnosis.

But his theory?

He had never glanced at that illustrious man, hidden, as in bewildering light, in his radiant fame. He had seen Ledsky not as a man but as glory. The criminal he had seen was Cumber.

Now his theory was broken on the wheel of facts.

His quick mind leaped to the new hypothesis.

Cumber's statement gave up more than was written in the dim words. It revealed the identity of the second man in the car at the funeral—the mere sight of whom had driven Mrs. Benton into a faint-like trance. That was Ledsky. It was *he*. It explained "Mrs. Benton's" open departure that morning from the house, which Mr. Guelpa in his perplexity had attributed to self-hypnosis. Just before leaving, the professor must have plunged her into that trance-state wherein she was indeed Mrs. Benton, effected the tawdry disguise, and sent her out—at the appointed hour—straight into the arms of the detectives.

Yes, Cumber's after-death denunciation of the great man whose tool he had been, threw light into the obscurity of the case. It might be true. And yet it could not be true; Mr. Guelpa took no pleasure in admitting even to himself that he had committed an error in investigation; and here his loyalty to his illustrious colleague held him. Cumber's infamous slander!

"I will not believe it," he muttered; and yet he knew he was trying to convince himself—

He went toward the telephone to call up Professor Ledsky's office but already the bell was summoning him. The well-known voice spoke:

"Mr. Guelpa? My dear colleague. Are you alone in the laboratory?"

"I am alone—my friend," the last two words came hesitatingly.

"Then listen. This morning I took your advice. You remember? I *threw her to the wolves!* It was the only way to save her, for I knew you were there and would rescue her from them. She is safe?"

"Forever," Mr. Guelpa replied.

"Now come to me—to my office—I am waiting for you. You shall know the truth. And, until you know it, do not judge me, my friend—"

That was all. The connection between them went dead. Mr. Guelpa put the photograph of the blank page—now hot with words—in his pocket. After one sad glance round the scene of Professor Ledsky's triumphs, he returned to the house. He found Doctor Hamilton and Mrs. Ledsky still in the living-room. He bowed in his neat way. His face was calm, kindly. He smoothed his wisps of hair over his bald scalp, petted his mustache, smiled.

"Mrs. Ledsky, my work here is done. May I thank you for your kind hospitality and bid you good-by?"

"Must you really go? But I shall see you very soon again, for I am going to capture Julie, you know," she declared in her blithe way.

"You will be very welcome, dear lady," said Mr. Guelpa, bowing once more, "but about Julie—ah, you must ask her mother."

Doctor Hamilton, who had risen when Mr. Guelpa entered, said he would drive him into town. He lingered while the little Frenchman sought his coat and stick and polished his round hat. And Mr. Guelpa overheard a word or so between them:

"You must come and dine with us soon, Doctor."

"It will be a great pleasure."

"You know my husband?"

"Only by reputation."

"You must meet him."

"Thank you. I shall be happy to do so."

Doctor Hamilton took up his overcoat; it was on the couch where "Mrs. Benton" had lain, and rejoined in the hall an impatient Mr. Guelpa.

They drove cityward rapidly. For a long while neither spoke. Mr. Guelpa had thoughts of his own. The doctor, also, had quite enough to think of.

"I have something very important to tell you," Mr. Guelpa said at last, "in the strictest confidence. I may need your assistance. So may the poor woman we have just left in that house—your assistance and your support."

"I think you may count on me," the doctor returned; his mood was not expansive.

"When you know, I am sure you will help us,"

Mr. Guelpa was firm and decisive; he had laid away his genial social manner, "and you must know."

Shortly he related his experiment in bringing to life Cumber's denunciation.

"You saw that unhappy woman hypnotized into an unconscious automaton—sent out to help do the work of crime? Who do you suppose was responsible?"

"Cumber."

"No, a living man. We are going to see him now. And he was my friend, my colleague, my host."

"Ledsky! Good God!"

Doctor Hamilton brought the car to a sudden stop. His hands fell from the wheel. He turned toward the little man, whose face was now a meaningless mask.

"Impossible! His wife!"

"It is the truth. There may be extenuating circumstances. Palliations. If there are I shall hear them—and the sooner if you will kindly start your motor, Doctor."

"What the devil can he say?" Hamilton shouted. "Why, damn him, I could see him in hell—that little martyr—that little woman." Rage and pity choked him. He stamped on the starter and the car leaped ahead.

"Extenuating circumstances," he exclaimed, "what? Unless he is mad, the damned alienist."

"Many alienists are mad," Mr. Guelpa observed; "that is probably why they are led to take up that study—in order to learn how to keep themselves out of the madhouse, eh? But Ledsky—this great man? *Tiens! tiens! tiens!*" he ended reflectively and relapsed into silence.

The car raced along.

Hamilton had clinched his jaws on the words that worked angrily. Mr. Guelpa watched the streets with eyes that were, for once, unseeing. When they stopped before Professor Ledsky's office, Mr. Guelpa entered alone, requesting the doctor to park his car and rejoin him there.

The door of the reception-room opened to his hand. There was no one there. The door of the private office stood ajar. He paused and then went in.

Professor Ledsky was dead.

He was lying on a couch, his body settled in the quietude of death. There was a low table near the couch; the dead hand lying on it, the fingers curled, as though they had been tapping out some predestined tune—some rhythmic dance of death. And under the dead hand lay a large envelope.

Mr. Guelpa read his own name on it and placed it in his pocket.

"It was the only way out," he whispered to himself, "he was a great man."

He did not turn when Doctor Hamilton came in softly and stood at his side. Both men were silent.

The hot, restless arrogant eyes of the illustrious scientist were quiet enough now, staring into a blank world.

But even in death the great man was majestic—mysterious—formidable.

CHAPTER XXI

DEAD LIPS SPEAK

CONFESSIO*N* destroys. When the past is confessed it ceases to exist. It is obliterated by the present. The present pushes forward its new problems and perplexities. Perhaps that is why crime-haunted women creep into churches and rid themselves of the past; why death-beds are murmurous with somber confessions.

It is hard to say.

It may be merely the heritage of far-off ancestors who shrieked dying terror to obscure gods of forest and cave. The instinct to "tell it all" persists.

Even Ledsky confessed. There was no ear into which he could whisper his confession. So he wrote it. And Mr. Guelpa, in his mind, could see the lean tall figure bent over the paper, writing, the thick disorderly hair falling over the high-domed forehead, the quivering face—the eyes, pools of black torment, of defiance, of despair—

He remembered a scientific prediction the great man had made the first time they met; strange words:

"Man will know nature, yes, but the terrible thing is he will know man. Science will lay him open."

Strange words; Mr. Guelpa recalled how Ledsky had declaimed them, hands darting to and fro, eyes black as anthracite gleaming; this Ledsky, so alive and urgent; this genius who had captured and defined the "Psychic Parasites," who had demonstrated to the scientific world the "Transformations of Living Beings"—dead now.

Not all dead, for his books would live. Here, too, in the feverishly written pages Mr. Guelpa held, was the real man. Possibly. And the hand that "laid him open" was not that of science; it was his own. Alone in his private room in the hotel, Mr. Guelpa took up the pages of Professor Ledsky's last manuscript. Once, already, he had read them rapidly. Now he went over them, slowly, page by page. He was reading not only the words, he was studying as well the fluctuating handwriting—the fevered script, the breaks, the sudden starts, as a new idea drove in. Hours must have gone to the making of it he thought. There were passages in French. The handwriting changed, deepened, sloped this way and that—the meticulous penmanship of the scientist running off into boyish scrawls. Yet always it was Ledsky who wrote. It was his personal gesture. His writing gesture, whether it was a result of trained will or of a psychic reflex. Writing is a gesture. And the gesture

is the man. It remains inherently the same, Mr. Guelpa was fond of saying, from first to last, just as the first step of the child prefigures the future walk of the man. The handwriting of the manuscript was as confessional as the words.

The precise beginning; the hand was steady then, as it wrote:

“My dear confrère and friend:

“I am writing this statement for you, and for you alone. I confide myself to your understanding and to your sympathy. When you have read it, I trust, you will still permit me to call you my colleague and my friend. I begin.”

“*Tiens!*” exclaimed Mr. Guelpa; he straightened his eye-glasses and bent once more to the page. The first paragraph was headed “environment.”

It was as though he had thrown up his laborious youth, as a defense in front of the black disaster of flight from life.

Something of this Mr. Guelpa had heard before. But now he went more into detail. He told of his birth in a sodden village; poverty, ignorance, cruelty weighing on his childhood; his escape from it and the destiny that kicked him to and fro, and flung him, at last, into New York. The hard boyish years. The ambition that would not let him sink. Now and then a kindly hand. The drive through the schools—at last college. There the fierce brain soon conquered for him a place in the world—after

gaunt years, racking years. From triumph to triumph, degree upon degree, fame—the beginning of fortune and the conscious joy of his work, which was that of hunting man to the inmost cave of heredity, where he huddled with the obscure ancestors hidden in his subconscious mind. Fugitive man, who could be captured and stripped of his psychic parasites, transformed, split into deep-buried personalities.

The pen had raced on. The arrogance of the great scientist could not lay it aside. This was Ledsky triumphant.

And then the handwriting shifted to uncertainty. The pen had moved slowly.

The woman entered.

He was walking in the street and she came upon him from a garden gate. A child, with her sixteen years. Not yet a woman. Flushed and startled she looked up at him. Her soft eyes met the gleam in his black eyes—and held. In that one imperative instant he had claimed her.

Love at first sight? A deadlier thing had happened. He had captured one of those rare "sensitives," who are the martyrs of science. (Kin to the sliced-up dog and the guinea-pig tossed into a furnace to race on the burning coals—in the interest of science!) He had found his "sensitive." His subject. All of her—from blithe girlish mind to the feeblest sensory nerve in the unawakened body—psychic and physical.

And the great Professor Ledsky, already famous, found no difficulty in marrying little Eleanor Barling, whose family life was broken. She went to him, a bird inexorably drawn to the serpent, because she had to go.

It may be there was a little love in her, for youth itself is love; perhaps, too, Ledsky loved her winsome youthfulness. But his science held the upper hand. It was upon her that he made those experiments in human transformations—to-day classic. It was upon this girl-wife that he loosed the psychic parasites—and studied them.

Mr. Guelpa shuddered a little as he read these cold paragraphs wherein alone the scientist spoke. He took up another page. And here the words came vehemently, in a turmoil.

It was the story of Peter Barling, wastrel and villain—robber, when he could safely plunder a defenseless sister, forger, too, when he forged the name of one who dared not prosecute him. He was right in assuming that his brother-in-law, proud of his hardly conquered place in public esteem, would not send him to a cell. And Barling knew more-over of the evil work carried on in the laboratory, in the house, as Ledsky tossed the poor hypnotized subject to and fro—from personality to personality—as though he were some dark creator giving life to women who wept and laughed as he decreed and then were flung ruthlessly into oblivion. The dark pride of the master who played with souls.

Peter Barling knew of this psychic crime, mysterious as it was to his light mind. It might mean something in his way through life which was that of forger, wastrel, thief and more deadly than all—black-mailer.

And the hour came.

One day—Mr. Guelpa pieced out the hurried narrative—two rogues met and knew they were one in infamy. Barling met Cumber—and there must have been laughter in the pit. It was in Los Angeles. Cumber who had played the fake-doctor game, peddled drugs, given hypnotic shows with various charlatans, had at last gone in for a medical degree. When Barling met him he was a medical student in a decent college, though he still clung to his familiar underworld. Rogue and rogue, they planned the Los Angeles insurance swindle. Was there not Eleanor Ledsky ready to their hand?

“So that was it,” Mr. Guelpa murmured.

Well enough Cumber must have known that a “sensitive,” once she has been long subjected to hypnotic control, is not the slave of her first master alone. She answers to hypnosis as well as to the hypnotist. Usually she will yield most readily to the first master; not always. It is not always the first lover who makes the deepest impression on a woman’s soul and body. Ledsky was away on his tour of the famous universities of Europe. Eleanor was alone. And Peter brought her to him by a pleading telegram that he was on his death-bed.

'Ah, that cry to a sister's heart! In a few hours she was on her way, for a second telegram from Barling's "physician" urged haste. Her brother was dying. When she descended from the train she stepped into a trap. It was Barling's "physician" who met her; and he was Ernest Cumber. She was taken to her brother's room—a white bed—she saw him there. Then Cumber spoke sharply. Eleanor Ledsky had departed. She was not to find herself again until she entered the train that bore her homeward, her brother bidding her good-by. During the period of her oblivion, Beth Forsythe walked about in her body, doing tragic things; and the Forsythe insurance swindle was successfully perpetrated. For Eleanor Ledsky, finally returning to her home, that interlude was obliterated. She knew only she had gone to Los Angeles, seen her brother, first in his bed, and then at the station as he saw her off. She was dazed and weak from Cumber's heavy-handed hypnotic treatment. Barling appropriated the greater share of the plunder. They awaited Ledsky's return. He came and—two cynical rogues, side by side—told him openly what had been done in his absence. Already he had been terrified when his wife told him of her visit to Los Angeles—to her brother's supposed death-bed—her blank memory—her finding herself on the train. Now he knew the answer to the riddle. He was in the grip of desperate men. And so there were years of hell for the wretched man.

He decided to keep Cumber under his hand. But Barling? In a few years he was a pauper once more, back again, hammering at Ledsky's door—clamoring for money, threatening to denounce him as the chief conspirator in the swindle—his wife trained for the rôle.

And always the professor paid, seeking money everywhere, by fees and lectures and books, toiling—only to pay it over into the red hand of the blackmailers.

Five years in which he had constantly to defend his wife against her brother—against the dog, Cumber, though he had brought him to heel—until she became dear to him as his own safety.

There came next in the manuscript a long tirade against Barling, this hound of hell.

Then followed that last confession of the man who fell—whose courage died within him and was replaced by crime.

Barling appeared again, from his vagrant life of evil. This time his threat struck deep into the harried man. He and Cumber had planned another insurance swindle and they demanded Eleanor Ledsky to enact again the rôle of "widow." Ledsky yielded because he had to yield, but he determined that both Barling and Cumber should pay the supreme penalty for their crimes. He planned their death. First that of Barling who was to fill the rôle of Benton and then—when he could bring it about with safety—then, Cumber. Thus he would

be done with them forever and Eleanor safe. They should die and he would bury them in a pit of crime and be a free man as he had been before. Crime, yes! But he was stacking the cards for murder—not money. So he agreed to take a hand in the swindle. No blundering now. He could trust his trained efficient brain, even when he bent its keen activities on crime. So the plot was laid. Under Ledsky's compelling psychic decree his wife became Mrs. Benton. Barling took the rôle of her husband. Cumber was the go-between. Ledsky, not without distrust, watched him—watched both men in spite of the danger to himself. And above all he watched his wife. He visited her stealthily at night—he risked even seeing her at the funeral.

For there was a funeral. Barling died, killed by minute doses of a vegetable poison, that finally—in one last savage dose—sent him out of life.

That was one.

Then destiny crashed down upon him.

Out of a clear sky came the thunderbolt!

It had been Mr. Guelpa himself who had revealed to him the details of the Benton case which the insurance company were about to prosecute. In that very first visit Professor Ledsky learned that his plot had been discovered; and that he stood in the very greatest peril of his life—that of public exposure and prosecution.

At once he had removed his wife from the Narrow House, restored her to normal consciousness,

and destroyed—as he thought—every trace of the crime in which he had been so deeply involved.

Barling was dead.

That was one.

Mrs. Benton had vanished—forever—he supposed.

But so long as Cumber lived he was not safe:

“No, I was not safe,” Ledsky wrote and underscored the words again and again.

And so these two men feared and hated each other. And Cumber—in his cowardice—convinced himself that death was stalking him as it had stalked Barling. That Ledsky would eventually kill him, as he had already killed the other rogue. He went about in terror of his life; terror of the law but more than anything else in terror of the formidable man who had mastered him—and he dared not flee.

So he wrote his denunciation of Ledsky—the demon. And hid it away, where only one who knew the secret could find it. Then, only, he thought he was safe. In his slow sullen way he told Ledsky what he had done; that he had written out a full statement of the crime of the Narrow House and the day he died, then Ledsky would be infallibly lost.

Ledsky let the rogue think what he pleased. He waited and watched, for he knew that what man has hidden a wiser man can find. And that denunciation must be destroyed.

It was not chance that led him to the book, and

to page 212, it was long and patient search when Cumber was out of the house. He finally found the document and secretly destroyed it. To Cumber he gave no sign. It was essential he should think that his weapon was still at hand. And so Cumber thought to the end. But a greater fear now had arisen from the web Mr. Guelpa was gradually drawing round him. And when he saw there was no escape he suddenly killed himself.

Another page and the last; Mr. Guelpa read it slowly. It contained the greatest compliment that had ever been paid him in his life—or was it a compliment?

“Mr. Guelpa, the first day I saw you I knew the end was drawing near. You know the reason for that. The ‘case’ you unfolded to me was my ‘case.’ Of course I had heard of your wonderful achievements. (God! what might we not have done, working together!) I did not fear you for your knowledge. It was not the criminologist I feared. It was *you*! And the horror of it was, that although your presence in my house afforded me the keenest intellectual pleasure—although I was drawn to you as I had been to no other man—although I and you—we seemed two great kinsmen—it was not for any of these reasons I insisted on your becoming my guest. It was because I feared you more than any man I ever met—not for myself, but for the innocent woman who was my wife. God! how I feared you—for her.

“Yes, I was mortally afraid—for her. I wanted you near me so I could follow your investigations

close at hand, thwart them, protect her against them. And all the while my admiration for your ability, for your personal characteristics grew and grew. As time goes I had known you but for a little while. But you are the only man toward whom my heart has ever really turned. Try to forget—and remember.

“When I saw that all was lost—that you had proved yourself too strong for me—I took your advice and threw poor Eleanor to the wolves that you might save her. I am dying even as I write these last words, that you may protect her and if necessary prove her entire innocence. I know you will save her—this human being whom I made a toy of our science. But in spite of all I loved her. I love her now.

“You alone can see her through this horror, for your wisdom is as deep as my crime—my crime against her soul. The unpardonable crime!

“You were Destiny’s messenger to me, bringing the decree that my life must pay for my sin. I am glad it was you, and no other, who brought it. Dear confrère—dear friend—”

Then an urgent, terrified signature.

“Hugo Ledsky.”

A dead man talking. Death explaining life.

CHAPTER XXII

SEAWARD

CRIMINALS had always found Mr. Guelpa rather soft of heart. He was a little like Rossignol, the Paris detective, who was tremendously keen on fishing, yet, when he had caught a fish, was always tempted to toss it back into the water. Mr. Guelpa, however, was saved from Rossignol's sentimentality, by a sense of justice and also by a brisk little vanity that made him want to crow, after downing one of his life-long adversaries—the men of crime. He was not careless of his fame in the world. He tried to live up to the vanity of his dyed mustache. And yet there must have been something wrong with his heart. It was always getting in his way. Too often it had persuaded him to lose the glory of a criminological victory that might have made a big noise in the world, merely in order to save from disastrous exposure some victim—some innocent attendant—of the crime he had uncovered.

Punishment, yes, for the guilty, but why shame and destruction for the innocent?

Mr. Guelpa folded up the tragic pages. Ledsky

had appealed to him—as friend and scientist—that the scandal of his downfall might not besmirch the white science of truth-seeking to which they had given their lives.

“Ah, astute! astute!” Mr. Guelpa commented softly. “He knew that would hit me hard.”

And the woman?

Trusting in his confrère, Ledsky had thrown her to the wolves of the law, that he might save her. How?

He knew that in American jurisprudence there is still lingering an ignorance of the scientific laws that govern hypnotism—a dread of charlatanism—a fear of this strange force which is yet only definitely known in the great hospitals of Europe, and in the workshops of the trained psychologists.

“But, *bon Dieu de bon Dieu!* if they bring that poor woman into court, I will give them a demonstration that will make the lawyers duck under water and send the experts leaping over each other like dolphins, eh?”

He chuckled in appreciation of himself. What a triumph! Science versus law—his own victorious science!

“*Tiens!* no,” he reflected, “she’d go free, but she would carry the scars of the wolves’ teeth on her for life!”

There was another way. A way less glorious for Mr. Guelpa. Even the credit of it was not to be his.

That all went to John Faynis.

He was a wolf of the law, but a trained wolf—trained to attack or defend. He put his coldly savage wits to work, and they served him even better than the influence he had with the Great Orient, before which he laid the case.

The guilty ones had escaped down the shadowy death-trail. Only the ghosts of dead detectives could hunt them down and have them up to be hanged by the ghostly rope of a phantom hangman.

“And,” said John Faynis, his half-closed eyes opening suddenly, “there is not a lawyer living who would counsel you to take Mrs. Ledsky into court. Her defense is impregnable—mark you, I know Mr. Guelpa and I believe him. There are too many precedents against you, in the first place. And you couldn’t get an expert who would dare go on the stand for you, no matter what you paid. They would know well enough, they’d leave their reputation behind them.

“Another thing: Both Ledsky and Cumber have left written testimony to the absolute innocence of the woman. And anyway, this is not quite the kind of publicity an insurance company wants, is it?

“Why teach the swindlers,” he added casually, “a new and deadlier game?”

It was that all right.

The Great Orient saw it; and, since it had saved

its fifty thousand dollars and the guilty men had died, without winning it, the company decided against that kind of publicity.

But there was also the successful swindle in Los Angeles. Of course that must be reimbursed, but—well, ten thousand dollars is not an impossible sum and John Faynis rather fancied he knew where it could be found.

This was not done in a day.

It dragged as things drag when deft legal fingers are pulling them this way and that, and officialdom squats on them heavily. But even the lingering lawyer comes to an end some time or other. Finally the Great Orient consented to drop the case and the Los Angeles company agreed to terms of the settlement; payment and oblivion.

"That cuts the umbilical cord," said Mr. Guelpa with satisfaction—he was of a scientific turn of mind.

"What?" asked Faynis, for they were in talk together.

"It separates Mrs. Ledskey once and for all from her past. It is, for her, a sort of new birth."

"Yes, I hope so."

"I know," declared Mr. Guelpa. "You see, the fact of her having already known of the swindle her brother perpetrated in Los Angeles—and the ten thousand dollars paid to the 'widow' of the man, Forsythe—for all this I had told her—made her eager and anxious to pay back this sum, without

asking for details which might have been rather hard for us to furnish. Having that very valuable property on the Hudson made our task both easy and practical."

"Then you really think that nothing of the past will ever return to cloud her normal consciousness?"

"Nothing—unless she should be so unfortunate as to again fall into such hands as—"

"Ledsky's—or Cumber's," concluded Faynis. "Look at it as charitably as you please, Mr. Guelpa, they were a pair of consummate scoundrels."

"No, no—Ledsky had great provocation and he was a big man," Mr. Guelpa maintained. "And what a life he made for himself. Lies, deceptions, fabrications! He had to. Take that rogue of a Cumber, for instance, whom he was obliged to keep in his own home, under his very eyes, that he might watch him, in defiance of his wife's wishes, passing him off as a poor devil devoted to his interests whom he hadn't the heart to turn adrift; while all the while the two men were ready to fly at each other's throats."

"Would it not be better that Mrs. Ledsky should know there are certain people and certain experiments she should guard against?" Faynis suggested.

"No, no," said Mr. Guelpa, "of course she is what is known as a 'sensitive,' and must be cared for, it may be for a long time. And I rather think she will be."

Mr. Guelpa's grin was entirely masculine. He couldn't help it; not even the most decorous man can, when he foresees a woman going daintily down the road which ends in ultimate marriage with some other man than himself. It is atavistic—the cry of a caveman ancestor; and every man has heard it. The average man can not even read of a betrothal of some unknown girl to an unknown man—without a buried howl of rage from the cave-ancestor, bidding him heave up his club and slay the male invader. Mr. Guelpa, being politely civilized, merely grinned. His atavistic impulse had been transmuted into that quaint feeling that there is something humorous about marriages in general, which is as far as the modern man dare go.

Mrs. Ledsky, after the first shock of her husband's death had worn away—that great man, his brain shattered by overwork, had poisoned himself in a fit of temporary madness, much to the distress of his contemporaries—had sold her property up the Hudson. The money she paid for Peter Barling's swindle was only a very small part of what she received.

She took an apartment near Washington Square, 'Alva, stolidly faithful, going with her. Mr. Guelpa's prediction that she might have some one to care for her, seemed already in the way of fulfilment, since Doctor Hamilton's home was but a few streets away. Evidently he considered her a patient, needing unceasingly constant attention. She

had come up out of the dark waters with a new radiance. The shadow of the somber tumultuous Ledsky vanished day by day. She had entered the safety and warmth of a lighted room, where no ghost walked—only the huge bearded figure of a doctor, tamed by a bewitching spirit of love.

And that spirit, having done its work there, went on its way howling over perfectly respectable males and females. For love is a deuce of a thing! And—so totally indifferent to the tranquillity of life, that it goes shimmying about, knocking 'em over to right and left.

It had a hard go at George Ringgold; and when it had him crouching in his corner, it seized the struggling Miss Kittie Glenn, washed the paint off her face, pulled up her stockings, hauled in her flags, and made her look like a girl who would "say yes."

And she said it; whereby in this well-ordered world George Ringgold was hugged by a dear girl, who was at once a wife and an enigma—as all wives are, good or bad; withal Mr. Ringgold found himself rewarded with a "peg-up" on his ambitious ladder.

All this should have satisfied even the most active love-spirit that ever ramped about New York. But it made its dreadful way to the old hotel near Washington Square, where after all these months, the Guelpas still lingered. It had turned its fateful eyes on Julie and her blonde beauty and her youth which was something between flower and fruit.

That emergent young woman was in the drawing-room talking, talking to her dear Eleanor. For Julie, talking was a newly-acquired art; she had had small practise that way, but of late—well, there was Eleanor, a fountain of confidential friendship—

Julie had been haunted by that dream of hers. She wanted to tell it to this friend. But she simply could not do it. She didn't know how. And yet if Eleanor could only understand—why, it was a prophecy! She could almost feel the atmosphere of the dream—the heavy darkness in that big room in the stone house, in which two men like evil things whispered and conspired—and then how Mrs. Ledsky had been driven out, literally pushed out of the dream, into freedom and safety.

Free from the dark men and the dark mystery of tragedy and crime, free—the dream had come true, but Julie knew very little of the real men who figured in that tragedy. She had only skirted its edge. And the actual facts were as unknown to her as to her friend. So of course she could not explain the dream—so why try.

Besides there were other and more agreeable things to talk about. The Guelpas were about to sail. It was spring now and the time had come.

“And to think you should be sailing to-morrow!” said Eleanor.

“Yes—to-morrow. Fa-ather has finished and we must go. Well, of course I love fa-ather and mother!”

"Of course you do, and *he* is a darling, Julie."

Julie laid a finger on her budding lips.

"He is up-stairs with them now," whispered Julie, "that is why I had to receive you down here."

"With them?"

"With fa-ather and mother, yes."

And then a tall youth, with long pale hair and a look of dignity stalked into the room. He went straight to Mrs. Ledsky, lifted her hand and kissed it in his foreign way, then he turned and faced Julie. Her blue eyes stared and her lips trembled:

"Paul! Paul!"

Whereupon Paul's grave face broke into an ecstatic grin. He seized the blonde girl by the elbows, jerked her out of the chair, and swung her into his arms; then something happened to Julie's mouth, and what part of her brain wasn't whirling told her he was "rushing her."

"So it's all right, you darlings," Eleanor exclaimed when an interruption seemed to be just about due.

"Mr. Guelpa has consented," was Paul's proud announcement, "he yielded—I brought him round."

"Oh, fa-ather," said Julie disdainfully, "he would come round but—mother?"

Mr. Paul Dupuis abated a trifle of his importance.

"Your mother said yes, conditionally. We are not to be engaged until my parents have given their consent. But that is all right," he added, "because

I know they will. My mother is an American, she was born here, and she has always declared her son should choose his own wife. Well, I have chosen—Julie. And, Mrs. Ledsky, you know I am sailing with the Guelpas to-morrow.”

Yes, Mrs. Ledsky knew.

Mr. Guelpa had finished the work that brought him to America. He had been induced to lecture at one of the universities. He had met the American kings of science; that was rare sport of the kind he liked—one brain plucking at another. He regretted leaving them. Perhaps the man of all men he had liked and admired the most was the great fate-ridden Ledsky who lay in a suicide's grave. However, when others spoke to him of the professor nothing in his manner gave any evidence of his feelings; which was to his credit.

He had solved the Benton mystery. It had been thrust at him. He could not turn away from it. He had been merely fate's errand-boy sent to pull down a man as formidable in science as in crime.

“He was a great man,” it was an oft-repeated eulogy of Mr. Guelpa; it was his epitaph on his friend; and the world would long agree with him.

And they sailed.

As the ship warped out from the dock Mr. and Mrs. Faynis, who had brought them down, were waving their shore farewells. Mr. Guelpa bowed again and again, bobbing his little round black hat.

Eleanor Ledsky and Doctor Hamilton stood side

by side on the dock. Julie was shouting them farewells, Paul by her side.

"Do you see them? Look, Jules-Marie," Mrs. Guelpa said, signaling with her handkerchief.

"Yes, I see them," Mr. Guelpa replied, "they are standing quite close together." And Mr. Guelpa nodded and smiled and waved to Mrs. Ledsky and her companion, tossing up his hand in a parting salute.

Then he tipped his little black hat.

The great ship swung seaward.

THE END





